

**BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA**

**DESHAPRIYA  
JATINDRA MOHAN SENGUPTA**

**PADMINI SENGUPTA**

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**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION**

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This is the latest in the series of biographies known as the "Builders of Modern India". Among the most illustrious sons of Bengal, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta was born in 1885 in a prominent land-owning family of Chittagong. Athletic in build and with a sharp intellect, he was called to the bar in England. Back in India with his English wife, Nellie Sengupta, he set up practice as a barrister at Calcutta. Within a few years, he had built up a lucrative practice and earned name as a brilliant lawyer. The ignominy and injustices to which his countrymen were being subjected by the foreign rulers were, however, too much for this noble and patriotic Indian. He was irresistibly drawn to the country's struggle for freedom and soon became an accepted leader of Bengal. He was five times elected Mayor of Calcutta and is still remembered as one of the most popular and able men to preside over the Municipal Corporation of India's largest metropolis.

*(Continued on back flap)*

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**DESHAPRIYA**

**JATINDRA MOHAN SENGUPTA**

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The object of this Series is the publication of biographies of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and in the struggle for independence.

It is essential for the present and coming generations to know something about these great men and women. Except in a few cases, no authoritative biographies are available. This Series has been planned to fulfil this need and comprises handy volumes containing simple and short biographies of our eminent leaders, written by competent persons who know their subject well. The books in this Series are of 200 to 300 pages each and are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace more elaborate biographies.

Though desirable, it may not be possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. The work of writing these volumes has to be entrusted to persons who are well equipped to do so. Therefore, for practical reasons, it is possible that there might be no historical sequence observed. It is hoped, however, that within a short period, all eminent national personalities will figure in this Series.

Mr. R. R. Diwakar is the general editor of this Series.

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DESHAPRIYA JATINDRA MOHAN SENGUPTA



*Builders of Modern India*

**DESHAPRIYA  
JATINDRA MOHAN SENGUPTA**

By

**PADMINI SENGUPTA**

**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING  
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*To*  
*My Husband,*  
*Ranendra Mohan Sengupta,*  
*Youngest Brother*  
*of*  
*Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**My profound thanks are due to my husband, Ranendra Mohan Sengupta, for translating Bengali books and documents and reminiscing to me about his brother, Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta. My thanks are also due to Smt. Nellie Sengupta.**

## FOREWORD

I am very happy that my sister-in-law, Padmini, has asked me to write a foreword to the biography of my husband "Deshapriya" which she has been requested to write. I wish they had met.

My husband was very much interested in politics even as a young man. Although he enjoyed a normal life more than most people, it was not very surprising that he entered politics to the great extent that he did.

During the height of the Non-cooperation Movement, Mahatmaji wrote an article in *Young India* under the caption "Chittagong to the Fore!" The district had virtually gone headlong into the Movement. Persons from all walks of life and of all ages responded to Mahatmaji's call most enthusiastically. I hope nobody will contradict me when I say that Jatin was the central figure of the Movement—really, he was the central life-force of the Movement in Chittagong.

As Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, by dint of his love and sacrifice, had become the idol of undivided Bengal, so also had Jatin become the idol of Chittagong.

The transformation of Mr. J. M. Sengupta, a member of the Inns of Court, to "Deshapriya" Jatindra Mohan was a tremendous one, but not so sudden as many may be inclined to think. His love for his motherland had found expression even in his university days

and his love of truth made him chivalrous in every walk of life.

As the power within him would neither allow him to limit his activities within the district of Chittagong, nor to confine himself to politics only, so his area of activities spread not only from one end of India to the other, but also far beyond its borders; his field of activities embraced all spheres of life.

He was a loving husband, a loving father and friend to sons and brothers, a prop to his kinsmen, a delightful friend and friendly with everyone, including his opponents. That is why he gained respect from every chair he adorned; no walk of life was, as it were, foreign to him.

As a lawyer, as a sportsman, as a political fighter, as a parliamentarian, as a political reformer and organiser of outstanding ability, as a promoter of Hindu-Muslim unity, as an upholder of equal civic rights for all in the Mayoral chair of the Calcutta Corporation, as a beloved idol of all the Indian student community, he will be remembered with love and affection.

But his full story could not be told; the pages of his life were torn away, untimely, in 1933, and he was snatched away from us when he was in the very thick of the fray, when he was driving home to Englishmen the folly of British rule in India and its demoralising effects both in England and in India.

NELLIE SENGUPTA

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**PART I**

**SERVICE BEFORE SELF**

*“I yield to none in my love of the country or in my desire to use myself in her service.”*

**JATRA MOHAN SENGUPTA**  
*(In a speech delivered at the  
Mymensingh Conference, 1919)*



## CHAPTER I

### FAMILY BACKGROUND

Jatindra Mohan did not come from a rich family. His illustrious father, Jatra Mohan Sen, gradually acquired great wealth through his own hard and honest work. Jatra Mohan's father, Trahiram Sen, belonged to a prominent Vaidya family, but had to struggle against poverty. He married a girl called Menaka. He was a Kabiraj (Doctor of Indian medicine) and established such a high reputation for himself as a medical man that suffering patients felt all the better even before his visit, in mere anticipation of his coming presence among them. In spite of a steady practice and a well-organised regular life, he never really became rich, possibly because, through the kindness of his heart, he treated many poor patients free.

Trahiram and Menaka had four sons—Naba Kumar, Nil Kamal, Pyari Mohan and Jatra Mohan—and one daughter, Tripura Sundari. Of these five children, Jatra Mohan was the most illustrious. He was born in 1850. When Trahiram and Menaka died, Nil Kumar became the *gomasta* or caretaker of an estate on a salary of Rs. 12 a month. Jatra Mohan, who was anxious to pursue higher studies, earned a scholarship after his Matriculation which helped him to pass the B.A. and B.L. examinations. He set up practice as a lawyer in Chittagong, the leading port of East Bengal. In this important town, Jatra Mohan, through his rising practice, was able to become a landed proprietor and later a zamindar of Barama village.

Jatra Mohan married Binodini Devi, the third daughter of Ananda Charan Khastgir, a well-known personality of

Calcutta. Fifteen children were born to this happy couple—eight sons and seven daughters. The eldest, Man Mohan, died soon after his own marriage and left behind his widow Kusum Kumari, a great and good woman, and beloved of the family. After the death of her mother-in-law, she took charge of the large joint family as its Bara Bowdi and remained so until her own death in 1950. Jatra Mohan's second child was a daughter, Sunadhini, who was drowned in a village tank at the age of eighteen. Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta was their third child and second son. The boy outshone most of his brothers in intelligence and spirit of service. Of Jatra Mohan's other children, the fourth was a daughter who died at birth. The fifth, a son, Phanindra Mohan, chose to live on in the village. The sixth and seventh, a son and a daughter, were twins. The daughter died, while the son, Nirendra Mohan, went to England and became a Doctor. He married Eva, a charming English girl. Though his English bride never came to India, she was nevertheless a true daughter-in-law of the great joint family, keeping her home in England open for all members who went abroad. There was always the security of Eva in London for all of us.

Nirendra Mohan and Eva had one daughter, Eileen, who, when a girl in her teens, was brought out to India and adopted by Jatindra Mohan and his wife Nellie as their own daughter. She was with her uncle in Ranchi when he died in internment.

Jatra Mohan's eighth child was Nalini who passed her I.A. with credit and died while studying for her B.A. soon after Nirendra's death. These two losses greatly depressed Jatra Mohan and increased in Jatindra Mohan the sense of responsibility for his family. Four more sons were born after Nalini—Dwijendra Mohan, Birendra Mohan, Sailendra

Mohan and Ranendra Mohan.\* The first three chose to stay in the village and did not pursue higher education while Ranendra Mohan proved a brilliant student and finally went to Cambridge. He is today the only surviving child of Jatra Mohan. Indira, the twelfth child, and another pair of twins, Sujata and Subrata, were the other girls in the family. Subrata, known as Chutki, was extremely intelligent and soon graduated and worked as a teacher even after her marriage. She died together with two of her children of typhoid in 1938, leaving behind her a son and a daughter. Even today, her friends speak of her as a great woman—valiant and loving.

Jatindra Mohan spent his childhood mostly in Chittagong and in Barama village. Chittagong, a sea-girt hilly country, beautiful with its wide, flowing rivers and important as the only seaport in East Bengal, came into prominence in the political fight for freedom through Jatindra Mohan's great leadership. In those days, it was usual for people in Bengal to work in nearby towns during the week and migrate to the village for the weekends. Between the two worlds of Chittagong and Barama, Jatindra Mohan was taught early to realise the importance of freedom from foreign rule. Jatindra Mohan himself was born in Barama village, as were most of his brothers and sisters. The village, a part of Chittagong District, now included in East Pakistan, was in the Thana of Patiya, well known for its top intellectual position and wealth. It corresponds to the village of Bikrampur in Dacca district, to which Deshbandhu C. R. Das belonged. It has produced a number of lawyers, teachers and doctors. For so small a place, it has indeed supplied India with a large number of illustrious men and women. On the north and south of Barama, there are extensive silt

\*The author's husband

lands which are very fertile and yield rich crops. Paddy, jute, til, mustard, potato, lentils, water-melons and vegetables grow luxuriantly in this rich soil. On the edge of this land flowed the beautiful river Shamka (meaning conch). Like the river Padma, this river, though smaller, was the cause of great destruction to the villages on its banks when it was in flood. The silt brought down by the rushing waters, however, left the land richer and more fertile and greatly benefited the people living on the banks of the rivers.

Jatra Mohan soon became a zamindar of this little village of Barama, and with his ingenious ideas and progressive views, he made full use of this fertile land not for the benefit only of himself and his family, but of the whole village. Barama itself, situated on the north bank of the Shamka, was a very beautiful place. A small tributary of the river, called Jat, flowed by Jatra Mohan's kitchen-garden and it was always full of fish. A good road led to the village. Jatra Mohan, with his town residence in Chit-tagong and village home in Barama, became a prominent figure. In this romantic environment, Jatindra Mohan was born and became the brilliant son of this quiet and good landowner.

## CHAPTER II

### PARENTS

As a Zamindar, Jatra Mohan set an example to other landlords in being indulgent and kind to his tenants. For instance, he never took a tenant to court and never indulged in litigation against the poor. It was understood that, whenever able to, tenants would pay their rent; but though this system proved commendable for the character of the Zamindar, it nevertheless led to the gradual deterioration of the property itself. In Jatra Mohan's absence, tenants began to default in the payment of their dues.

In Barama, there was a well known Zamindar, Akhil Chaudhuri, with whom Jatra Mohan could not agree on many points and usually some litigation or the other always existed between the two landlords. Akhil Chaudhuri mostly lost his cases to Jatra Mohan, but this did not deter him from going to court against his rival. A characteristic story of Jatra Mohan's generosity prevails. One evening, Akhil Chaudhuri wished to cross the river to go to Chittagong, and a great storm suddenly arose. No boats were available and Akhil Chaudhuri was left standing on the bank. He became very agitated as he had to be present in the District Judge's Court for a case against Jatra Mohan. Without his presence he would lose his case. At last, he noticed a boat plying its way on the river and shouted for it to pick him up and take him to Chittagong. In the boat was Jatra Mohan who was to fight the case against Chaudhuri; but when he saw his rival standing forlorn on the bank, Jatra Mohan invited him to board

the boat and go with him to Chittagong. Akhil accepted and the two antagonists arrived together for their case, and argued against each other.

Jatra Mohan was popular with the poor and much loved by them. His property increased with his practice and he soon bought tracts of land and houses both in Chittagong and in Barama. He built a large house in Chittagong where Nellie, the English widow of Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan, now lives.

As time passed, the house in which Jatra Mohan was born in Barama became too small for his growing family and he had to build a new and more spacious house in another locality. He added to the importance of his village by getting a Post Office opened and setting up a bazar. He also started an English Middle School called the Trahi-Menaka School which still exists in Barama. It was converted into a high school, after Jatra Mohan's death in 1919, by Jatindra Mohan. Later, Jatra Mohan's youngest son, Ranendra Mohan, completed the work and created a trust fund for the school.

A charitable dispensary was greatly needed in Barama. Jatra Mohan donated the land for it, but its opening took place only after his death. In fact, the meeting which was meant to inaugurate the dispensary was converted into a condolence meeting for the founder. The dispensary was named "Jatra Mohan Sen Charitable Dispensary".

Jatra Mohan had also extended his reforms to Chittagong and donated the land for this purpose. The Hall was built after his death. The Chittagong Association, of which he was the President, also received donations of land and money from him. He was greatly interested in girls' education and donated land to establish a Girls' High School in Chittagong. It came to be known later as the "Dr. Khastgir High School for Girls".



In 1907, when the partition of Bengal was still a great source of agitation, a steamship company was started connecting Chittagong, Akyab and Rangoon. Called the Bengal Steamship Company, it was said to have been started by Muslims in competition with the British India Steam Navigation, Co. But soon it was involved in financial difficulties. In his generosity, Jatra Mohan stood surety for a loan of Rs. 50,000 from the bank to the Bengal Steamship Co. Later, when the Company collapsed, Jatra Mohan was left with a large debt which he promised to repay—a promise he faithfully kept by selling off most of his cultivable land and property. He was also forced to sell his carriage and his wife's personal jewels; but such was his capacity to recoup that he soon began to reconstruct his life and recover his belongings. In this task, he gradually succeeded.

Jatra Mohan was born a Hindu, but his wife came from a renowned Brahmo family. Perhaps, some of the orthodox habits of the Hindus, such as idol worship, did not suit Jatra Mohan's broad principles in life. Later, he also became a Brahmo, but he had to suffer persecution for his change of faith. Nevertheless, he continued to persist in fostering religious reforms and practised his new religion without showing even a vestige of antagonism to other faiths.

In 1898, Jatra Mohan became a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, which entailed his stay in Calcutta for some time each year. Thus, his days became even more active between the chaotic city of Calcutta, the busy port of Chittagong and the simple but progressive village of Barama.

## CHAPTER III

### BOYHOOD AND CAMBRIDGE

Jatindra Mohan was born on February 22, 1885, on the seventh day of the waning moon of Phalguna. He grew up a slim and handsome boy. He was athletic by nature and fostered many sports clubs, including the Calcutta South Club and the Lake Club. He, therefore, came to be known later as the 'Sporting Mayor' of Calcutta.

When Jatin was five, his father wished to send him to school, but so attached was Binodini (his mother) to her third child that she refused to be parted from him. A private tutor was, therefore, engaged for two years, after which he was sent to the village school at the age of seven. After another two years, his mother brought him to Chittagong where he studied in the Hazari School, an institution for boys and girls. He was then admitted to the Collegiate School in Chittagong for two years. Here, his love for sport asserted itself so much that he organised a football team and even began to neglect his studies. Two tutors had to be engaged to coach him privately, but from them Jatin often managed to escape, though he always showed implicit obedience to his father. On hearing the complaints of the tutors, Binodini took matters in hand, and persuaded her son to study harder.

Jatra Mohan's great ambition was to shape one of his sons into a successful barrister and, in Jatin, he saw the makings of a brilliant lawyer. When he was thirteen, his father, who had become a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, was able to admit Jatin to the South Suburban School in Bhowanipore, Calcutta. Later, Jatin attend-

ed the Hare School and passed the Entrance Examination from there. Then, he went on to study at the Presidency College. At this time, Jatra Mohan stayed in Calcutta for two or three years and then returned to Chittagong. After Jatindra Mohan entered college, friends began to advise Jatra Mohan to send his son to England. His mother, Binodini, was greatly upset to hear of these suggestions. Jatin was the apple of her eye and she loved him too much to be able to part with him. So he continued to study in Calcutta. Jatin himself also wished to please his mother and not go so far away from home.

Later, his cousin, Satish Chandra Sengupta, wished to go to England, but his father died and his mother refused to send him away. Finally, both Satish and Jatin set sail for England on August 4, 1904. As Satish did not have the means to study abroad, Jatra Mohan paid for his passage and study in England, which he later repaid. Satish Chandra Sengupta proved a worthy student and became a renowned surgeon of Calcutta. Binodini's anguish at parting with Jatin was heart-rending. He was never to see her again.

Jatindra Mohan entered Downing College, Cambridge. One of Jatra Mohan's English friends proposed that Jatin should appear at the I.C.S. Examination. The Civil Service was then the most alluring career for highly educated young men, but Jatra Mohan refused firmly to allow his son to enter the I.C.S. as he did not want him to become a high official in the British Government. He wanted a free profession for Jatin and his English friend understood his point of view.

Jatindra Mohan realised very soon that education in the East was far different from that in the West where the development of the body was as important as that of the mind. The accent on sport and the honour given to sportsmen greatly pleased Jatin and he was very happy at Cambridge,

where he could give full vent to his love for sport. His father, who had earlier experience of Jatin's inclination to devote too much time to games, began to wonder whether Jatin would neglect his studies. He need not have feared, for his son succeeded equally well in his studies as in sport. He played cricket and tennis and got his colours in these and in rowing. He also became a prominent debater in the Indian Majlis, finally rising to be its President and also that of the East and West Society. Among his friends in Cambridge was Gurushaday Dutt who was later to enter the I.C.S. and become the founder of the Bratacharee Movement in Bengal. Jatin also met Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1907, when he went to Cambridge from Harrow.

In 1905 and 1907, events in India were beginning to be noticed in England. The accounts in the English papers were meagre; but they showed that big events were happening. Lala Lajpat Rai and S. Ajit Singh had been deported and Bengal was in an uproar.

Tilak's name and the news of the Boycott and Swadeshi movements were reaching Indians abroad. Jawaharlal Nehru later recounted that, during his school days in England, he felt lonely and despondent as he felt he could talk to no one, and he met Indians only during holidays. He went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in October 1907 at the age of seventeen and was there for three years, passing his Natural Science Tripos. In 1907, India became even more disturbed and was showing a fighting mood for the first time since 1857. Tilak's conviction, Aurobindo Ghosh's case, and the news of the Boycott and Swadeshi pledge by the masses in Bengal at last began to stir Indians in England. The Indian Majlis in Cambridge was a platform which aired Indian opinion. At this time, noted politicians like Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and G. K. Gokhale visited Cambridge. Nehru wrote in his

*Autobiography*\* : “Among my contemporaries in Cambridge there were several who played a prominent part in Indian Congress politics in later years. J. M. Sen Gupta left Cambridge soon after I went up. Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew, Syed Mahmud and Tasadduq Ahmed Shervani were more or less my contemporaries”.

Jatin was thus in good patriotic company. He finished his Law Tripos, Part I, in 1907 and completed his degree in 1908 and then took his LL.B. degree in 1909. As a member of Gray's Inn, he was called to the Bar in London in 1909, after which he returned to India.

\* *An Autobiography*, by Jawaharlal Nehru, John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1936, p. 22

## CHAPTER IV

### MARRIAGE

While in Cambridge, Jatindra Mohan met his future wife. She was Nellie Grey. Her mother, Mrs. Grey, was a gracious and kind lady and often used to invite Indian students over to her home, knowing that most of them were homesick and lonely. On one of these occasions, Jatin went to tea and soon became a constant visitor. Gradually, he was attracted towards Nellie, which caused some consternation to her parents, for Nellie was their only child and the idea of her marrying an Indian and going away so far away from home was anything but welcome. In the meanwhile, Jatindra Mohan wrote to his father about marrying an English girl, but his father objected as Jatin had just qualified as a Barrister, and could ill afford to marry at this time. Besides, a foreign wife, he felt, would lead to endless difficulties. Jatra Mohan suggested that his son should return. Jatra Mohan also wrote to Mrs. Grey. He put forward three reasons for his disapproval of the marriage. These were: the difference in religion; the fact that an English girl may not be happy in an Indian home where she would have to fit into a large joint family and work with the other members of the house; and that Jatin had no income as he had not yet established a practice at the Bar. He hoped that Mrs. Grey would agree with his reasons against the marriage. Mrs. Grey's own objection was that Nellie was their only child and she did not wish her to go away from home to so distant a land. Jatra Mohan, therefore, wrote to Jatin to return at once and money for the return passage was sent to his tutor. Nellie and Jatin were

made to understand by their parents that there were no prospects of their marriage taking place. Jatin left for India after bidding a sad farewell to the girl he loved so much.

As Jatin sailed towards India, his mind was constantly tortured by the idea of having bid farewell for ever to Nellie. Would he ever return to England? Many a sleepless night was spent in striving to solve this problem, and then, all at once, things cleared in his mind when he reached Port Said. His duty to his girl and his love for her overcame every other consideration. At Port Said, he saw a ship on its way to England. Suddenly, Jatin decided to board that ship and return to England and marry Nellie. He, therefore, disembarked from his ship and took a passage back to England.

Nellie Grey's delight at seeing her much loved friend back again so quickly can well be imagined. Mrs. Grey felt desolate, and she was so worried that she threatened to cut Nellie off without a shilling. She strongly opposed the marriage. But Jatin explained to her the mental battle he had waged while on board. He had tried to fight against marrying an English girl, but had not been able to succeed. He thought he had to marry Nellie now or never. Finally, unable to obtain the consent of the distraught mother, the young couple married secretly in a Registry Office in Royston, about 15 miles away from Cambridge. When they returned and told Mrs. Grey about it, she was greatly upset. However, being a good and kind lady, she gave her blessings and accepted the situation. She also showered presents on the young couple and arranged a reception to which a number of friends and relations were invited.

In the meantime, Jatra Mohan was anxiously awaiting the return of his son, and when Jatin did not arrive by the scheduled ship, he was very worried and sent a cable to Cambridge. Jatin had already written to his father about

his mental agony and his deep love for Nellie. Soon after the marriage, he sailed for India with his English bride. The scene of farewell between mother and daughter was touching—Mrs. Grey broke down. A loving and affectionate person, Mrs. Grey at last reconciled herself to her lonely life.

When Jatin and his bride reached India, Jatra Mohan and his family soon lost all their fears of having an English girl share their joint family, and became devoted to the foreign *bow* (bride). Jatra Mohan wrote to Mrs. Grey after a few months and said he was very happy that Nellie was his daughter-in-law.

In 1925, when Ranendra Mohan, Jatin's youngest brother, went to Cambridge, Mrs. Grey received him as her own son and looked after him with great affection. Nellie and her mother kept up a regular correspondence up to the time of the death of Mrs. Grey many years later. Mrs. Grey was overjoyed when Jatin, Nellie, Shishir, their eldest son, and Anil, the youngest, visited England in 1923 for the first time since Nellie left England in 1909. Jatin was by then a famous man, and Mrs. Grey was very happy and proud of her son-in-law's leadership. Jatin and Nellie visited England again in 1931.



## CHAPTER V

### HOME LIFE AND EARLY CAREER

Jatindra Mohan had returned to India as a full-fledged Barrister, obtaining the B.A. and LL.B. degrees from the Cambridge University and having been called to the Bar from Grey's Inn, London. He stayed at first in Chittagong with his wife, who soon became a respected and loved part of the big joint-family. Her father-in-law, Jatra Mohan, now felt that his son had done no wrong in marrying a foreign girl; on the contrary, he realised that she would be a great asset, in the true Hindu sense, and stand beside her husband in every walk of life. Her eldest son, Shishir, was born in Chittagong on May 11, 1910. After about a year's stay in Chittagong, Jatindra Mohan and his family moved to Calcutta where he started practice as a Barrister in the Calcutta High Court. The family stayed mostly in small flats as Jatindra Mohan was not rich. Their first residence was situated on Lansdowne Road, after which they moved to Ray Street. Life was quiet at this time, for though Jatindra Mohan associated himself with the Congress quite early, the political situation after the flare-up due to the partition of Bengal was quieter and the moderates seemed to have taken control of national aspirations.

Jatindra Mohan gradually built himself a good practice in the legal profession. Being unable to live on his small income, he took up a lecturer's job in the Ripon Law College in order to supplement his earnings at the Bar. His youngest brother, Ranendra Mohan, was then brought to Calcutta by Jatindra Mohan who was twenty-one years his senior, and he grew up with his own sons. The second

and third sons of Jatindra Mohan were born in Calcutta, but the second, Amar, died in infancy.

Jatindra Mohan's home life in Calcutta was extremely happy. Politics and patriotism had not as yet claimed him. He loved tennis and there was a court in the compound, which satisfied him, as he often had tennis parties. Indoors, bridge was a favourite pastime. There is an amusing story of Jatindra Mohan trying to teach his wife to play bridge, which she never really learnt. Jokingly, one day, he asked Nellie to trump his own trick. Quite innocently, she wasted a trump on her own partner's winning ace, much to the amusement of everyone, and of Nellie also, who loved a joke against herself.

Jatindra Mohan became a member of several clubs. The two noted clubs he joined were the Calcutta Club and the Orient Club. Being a happy-go-lucky man, Jatin made many good friends, one of them being Mr. S. C. Roy, brother of Dr. B. C. Roy who later became the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Jatindra Mohan had already joined the Bar Library of the Calcutta High Court where he was able to find books to satisfy his voracious appetite for reading. This was the only hobby which he was able to continue when he spent so many months in prison later.

Jatindra Mohan and his family travelled to Chittagong and Barama every year during the Puja holidays. They journeyed in country-boats from Chittagong to their village across the river Karnaphuli and through the many canals joining the Shamka and the Karnaphuli. They used to arrive at dawn in the villages to the sound of Puja bells from the houses and temples. Disembarking from the huge boats, they would walk through the fields along the narrow bunds. A happy holiday always followed in the gaily decorated village. *Jatragans*, wrestling matches, sing-songs, swimming in the village tanks and large family get-togethers

were annual Puja features. Jatra Mohan had become a Brahmo by now and *pujas* were not celebrated in his house, even though the festive air prevailed. For the actual ceremonies, the family therefore visited the home of Dr. Satish Chandra Sengupta's father. During the Puja week, members of the two families and friends partook of really festive fare. The tenants often paid off their dues at this time by bringing fish, goats and vegetables to their indulgent landlord, who gave them receipts in lieu of cash payment. Though Barama was a small Hindu village surrounded by thousands of Muslims, there was complete harmony between the two communities, and the latter took active part in the Puja, just as Hindus also joined in the Muslim festivals. There was not even a vestige of Hindu-Muslim disunity at this time. Each community freely practised its own religion. After the Puja, the family would journey back to Chittagong.

Jatra Mohan used to start his work at dawn and continue until 9 A.M. Then he would go up to his house, have his bath and early lunch and go to the court which was located on a high hill from where one could see the landscape stretching away to the Arakan forests, right down to Burma.

After the holidays, Jatindra Mohan and his family would travel back to Calcutta, so happy and peaceful in those early days when the trials of politics had not as yet assailed their home. Jatindra Mohan loved playing with his two sons and his youngest brother, Ranen, who studied at Santiniketan for four years, from 1914 to 1918, but spent his holidays with his brother. On Sundays, Jatindra Mohan would take the boys to the Eden Gardens. Ranendra Mohan remembers the time when he returned finally from Santiniketan to join college in Calcutta. His brother would drive to the Gardens and often step across the Strand Road to Outram Ghat where a restaurant overlooking the river

Hooghly supplied the boys with very welcome ice-cream. Climbing trees and playing games and watching the beautiful lotus blossoms dance on the little lakes in the Eden Gardens filled the boys with joy. Tired and happy, Jatindra Mohan would return home with the boys and, after breakfast, the day would be spent in playing games, such as bray or other drawing-room pastimes. Often, relatives and friends would drop in, among them Jatindra Mohan's uncle Hem Khastagir and his family. This uncle—*Mejmama*—was a great favourite of the Sengupta family.

Jatindra Mohan's first political venture took place at the Faridpur Conference in 1911, which he attended as a representative from Chittagong. Here, Jatindra Mohan suggested that the next session should be held at Chittagong. This suggestion was accepted and Mr. A. Rasul was elected President. Jatra Mohan became Chairman of the Reception Committee. Surendranath Banerjee also came to attend the Chittagong session and was given a warm reception. His horse-carriage was actually pulled by enthusiastic young men, and he was brought to the meeting with great fanfare. Jatindra Mohan, at that time, was still very young and little known for his own merits. Whatever publicity he received was due to the fact that he was his father's son; but he was so keenly interested that he took part in every meeting.

In 1914, the first World War started and, under the Defence of India Rules, many Indians were jailed or interned by the British. In 1917, a small island called Kutubdia became the home of many political prisoners. A row of houses was built here for the internees, but being completely cut off from India, it was impossible for the prisoners to convey their many grievances to the authorities. Nor were those in charge given any orders to see to the welfare of the prisoners. Great discontent, therefore, prevailed and

when the conditions became unbearable, the prisoners made a plot for breaking out. They successfully rowed out towards Chittagong. Their object was to make personal representations to the District Magistrate. In the meantime, the Kutubdia police sent a telegram to Chittagong informing the authorities that the prisoners had escaped. They were arrested before they could land and were prosecuted. The internees appealed to Deshbandhu C. R. Das to defend them. The great patriot and lawyer came to Chittagong and tried his best to defend the prisoners, but they were convicted for three months.

Jatindra Mohan had also come to Chittagong at this time. Deshbandhu strongly criticised Surendranath and other moderates who were controlling the Congress Party at that time. Soon, a split took place between the moderates and the extremists in connection with the election of Annie Besant as President of the Congress. Surendranath opposed the Congress choice, but the extremists were determined to elect her. The Home Rule League of Annie Besant had by now acquired an unprecedented influence and branches were established throughout India. Unable to tolerate this widespread agitation, the Madras Government interned Annie Besant, Arundale and Wadia. This action created anti-British sentiment. The extremists and Home Rulers launched a strong agitation against the Government. To oppose this, Surendranath Banerjee held a meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall; but he was forced to leave the meeting. After this incident, there was open conflict between the moderates and the extremists.

The year 1917 proved memorable for political reasons. Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India made his famous announcement about British policy in regard to self-government in India. He came to India in November 1917 to enquire into and take evidence on the many political griev-

ances with the co-operation of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford. After working for six months, he returned to England. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were published in June 1918. Two months later, an open session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay under the Presidentship of Syed Hasan Inam who declared that the reforms were unacceptable. This view of the special Congress session was later adopted by the annual Congress meeting held at Delhi in December 1918.

In 1917-1918, another important event took place. Though many young revolutionaries had been deported under the Defence of India Rules, the Government still felt that revolutionary tendencies were prevalent. The Rowlatt Committee was set up and its report was published soon after the Montagu-Chelmsford report. A little later, the Government presented two Bills, called the Rowlatt Bills. India had helped the British extensively during the World War, with men and money and Indians were deeply hurt by the ingratitude of the British in pursuing a heartless policy towards India—the Rowlatt Bills gave the Government powers to imprison people without trial on the charge of sedition. The Bills were called “Black Bills” and their enactment caused violent public reaction in 1919 and directly brought about the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in the Punjab.

In 1919, the Bengal Provincial Conference was held at Mymensingh and the whole of Bengal was astir. Jatra Mohan was elected the Chairman of this Conference. Though he was now an old man, he did not refuse the invitation as he considered it a great honour to preside over a function which was usually given only to outstanding men of the Province. At this time, he suffered a great shock in the death of his son Nirendra Mohan in England, and his daughter Nalini in Chittagong. In his old age and bereavement, he looked sad and bereft, but out of love for the country

he accepted the Presidentship. He died a few months later on November 2, 1919.

The speech that he delivered at the Mymensingh Conference reflected his life's work and feelings. He said : "I yield to none in my love of the country or in my desire to use myself in her service". His fatherly and patriotic advice was much appreciated; he was too ill to read out his whole speech and his son Jatindra Mohan, who was now becoming a familiar figure in the public eye, read out the rest of his father's speech.

Jatra Mohan died in Calcutta after a short illness. His death placed a great responsibility on the shoulders of Jatindra Mohan. The administration of the landed estate, the large joint-family of younger brothers and sisters, besides his own family, were all his responsibility. Jatindra Mohan soon found that it was not possible to manage the property in both Chittagong and Barama while practising in Calcutta. He, therefore, left the administration of his estates entirely to Umesh Chandra Nundy, a devoted follower of Jatra Mohan.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIRST POLITICAL SUCCESS

At the time of Jatra Mohan's death, India was in a state of ferment because of the atrocities committed in Jallianwala Bagh. The Amritsar tragedy shook the country to the core. Great resentment was felt against the Hunter Committee which had been set up to investigate the mass murders. The Congress appointed another committee to enquire into the tragedy. At this time, Rabindranath Tagore renounced his title and Mahatma Gandhi surrendered his Kaiser-i-Hind Medal to the British and announced a programme of non-cooperation.

In order to decide upon a policy during this difficult period, the Congress held a special conference in Calcutta in September 1920, which was presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai, the "Lion of the Punjab". After many years spent in America where he had done much pro-India publicity, he had returned to India and had taken up the fight for freedom with great ardour. Jatindra Mohan worked as Additional Secretary to this conference. This session became famous for the non-cooperation policy which it inaugurated. Deshbandhu C. R. Das tried to oppose non-cooperation and was supported by Bipin Chandra Pal and Jatindra Mohan. Gandhiji's resolution for non-cooperation was, however, accepted. The next conference was held at Nagpur, presided over by Vijayaraghavachariar. Deshbandhu C. R. Das and his followers attended it. Deshbandhu believed in Satyagraha, but did not agree with the boycott of Council entry and other non-cooperation policies. Later, however, he yielded to Mahatma Gandhi's persuasion and



himself proposed the acceptance of the non-cooperation resolution. The whole audience was taken aback and Bipin Chandra Pal still refused to accept it. Gandhiji's resolution was passed unanimously with Deshbandhu's support, and the Non-cooperation Movement became a great success in Bengal.

When the resolution on non-cooperation was confirmed at Nagpur, there was great excitement and 1921 became a landmark in the progress of the freedom struggle. Deshbandhu C. R. Das was a towering personality and commanded a tremendous following. He was also a mighty leader at the Bar, but such was his devotion and his sincerity in supporting this resolution that he abandoned his practice at the Bar and sacrificed a substantial income. At this time, people abandoned their professions and students boycotted colleges and schools. Even Jatra Mohan's school in Chittagong was closed and the professors gave up their jobs. This whole-hearted non-cooperation set an unprecedented example. Jatindra Mohan continued to stay in Chittagong and gave up his practice for three months to organise the freedom struggle in his home town. By hard work, he reached the top of his profession; but he sacrificed all that he had achieved for his country. At first, he planned to suspend his practice for only three months, but actually he could not resume his work for two whole years. He had realised that, in order to create a successful movement, it would be necessary to organise all strata of society, particularly the lower, into an integral unit. He, therefore, held meetings among the poorer classes—cultivators and peasants and labourers. When people heard of these meetings, thousands came to listen to Jatindra Mohan's message of national reconstruction. He set up committees in different areas, and the people began to feel the strength of the organisation.

At this time, the Burmah Oil Company had an Agency in Chittagong managed by Bullock Brothers and Co., Ltd. The workers of this oil company were under-paid and, despite many appeals, their unsatisfactory conditions of work continued. Being unorganised, they were unable to make their voices heard. The workers then came to Jatindra Mohan to form a union. A labour meeting was called and Jatindra Mohan explained the importance of unity if wrongs were to be redressed. Finally, the Burmah Oil Company Union was formed and Jatindra Mohan was elected its President. Then an unprecedented thing happened. Benode Babu, a higher-paid clerk had joined the movement; when he attended office, he was called by Mr. Martin, the Manager of the Company, who angrily asked him to explain his conduct and to seek the pardon of the Company. Benode Babu told him that he had done nothing wrong. He was, thereupon, dismissed from the Company's service. An urgent meeting of the Union was held the next day and nearly 2,000 workers, greatly disturbed by the behaviour of Mr. Martin, went on strike. This attracted the attention of the workers in the city organisations. The Company's management was very upset as everyone had joined the strike. Jatindra Mohan appealed to the workers to be calm and non-violent. He warned the workers to be careful as the police were looking for an excuse to arrest them. There was immediate calm. The question of money to finance the strike now arose and Jatindra Mohan started a fund, to which the local Congress Committee donated some money. When the strike was at its height, a passenger-cum-cargo ship called *Lanka* arrived at the port of Chittagong. Usually, the *sampans* rushed to meet the ships, but now the ship was given no attention. Instead, shouts of "Allah-ho-Akbar" and "Bande Mataram" and "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" greeted the bewildered men on the ship.

When the *Khalasis* of the ship *Lanka* heard the cry from rows of workers on the shore, they also felt the excitement in the air. Jatindra Mohan then informed them of the strike and the *khalasis* jumped into the river from the ship and refused to listen to the order of the Captain. No one gave any thought to their jobs. Now, the *sampans* went out to meet the *khalasis* and bring them ashore. The ship *Lanka* remained at anchor with her passengers. Later, the ship was somehow brought to the jetty and the passengers disembarked carrying their luggage, for there were no porters to attend to them. The cargo was all left on board. Another ship called *Badra* then entered the river Karna-phuli. When the Captain saw the plight of the *Lanka* through his binoculars, he anchored at the mouth of the river and realising that he could not disembark, sailed away towards Arakan. Hearing about the two ships, there was great excitement among the strikers, and two weeks passed without resumption of work. There were no signs of a settlement and no overt action on the part of the strikers. The authorities were silent. Finally, the District Magistrate served a notice under section 144 Cr. P. C. on Jatindra Mohan forbidding processions or meetings in public within a radius of seven miles of the Magistrate's Court and also issued a prohibitory order to the effect that no speeches should be delivered without the written permission of the Magistrate. Eleven of Jatindra Mohan's associates were also served with notices and the prohibitory order was made applicable throughout the town.

The order was, of course, disobeyed. There was a complete strike and *hartal* on May 4, 1921, throughout Chittagong. It was a most successful *hartal*. The next day, 12,000 workers assembled at 5 P.M. and spirited addresses were given to them by Jatindra Mohan, Mahim Chandra Das and others. An immediate *hartal* in all

departments was called. The Indian crew of the *Lanka* now left the ship and the mails could not be unloaded. The shops were closed and all traffic ceased. Even domestic workers in European houses went on strike. Thousands of workers of the railway workshop in Pahartali stopped work and the Congress started voluntary work for the hospitals by carrying bucketfuls of water for the patients, thus setting an example of national service. Jatindra Mohan and other leaders then led a procession through the streets of Chittagong. No one was arrested, but a notice was served by the Government for violation of Section 144.

At this time, Mr. Martin invited Jatindra Mohan to the Municipal Office to talk things over and try to reach a settlement of the strike. He accepted all the conditions for a settlement put forward by Jatindra Mohan. The District Magistrate also requested Jatindra Mohan to call off the strike.

Congress leaders then went to a meeting at the Commissioner's office on the invitation of the Magistrate and, as a result, it was decided that the order under Section 144 would be withdrawn. Jatindra Mohan was even congratulated by the authorities for conducting the strike in so peaceful a manner. He now found an even dearer place in the heart of the people and was declared the 'uncrowned king' of Chittagong. The District Magistrate kept his word and never allowed any form of victimisation of the strikers. Three-fourths of the people involved in the strike were Muslims, but Jatindra Mohan was their accredited leader. Hindu-Muslim unity prevailed and popular slogans included "Allah-ho-Akbar" and "Bande Mataram". But Jatindra Mohan had incurred the displeasure of the Europeans who were annoyed at the success of the strike. The leader of the European community called Jatindra Mohan the *enfant terrible* of Chittagong and strongly criticised his action.

On the other hand, all the newspapers praised Jatindra Mohan who was described as “the Sweepers’ King” by the newspaper *Servant*, and as a “brave and honest man, never half-hearted”.

## CHAPTER VII

### STRIKES AND THEIR REPERCUSSIONS

Most of the tea gardens in Sylhet and its neighbourhood were owned by Europeans, and the coolies were mostly imported from other Provinces. Agents were employed by the tea gardens to recruit these coolies and touts went around the various districts. They picked the really poor and needy and snared them by giving monetary gifts. They were promised a job and a happy life in the gardens. Being unemployed and very poor, they were naturally tempted to take a job which promised so many amenities. They were paid at the time of recruitment, but this money was recorded as a debt. Whenever they wanted to return home, they were presented with a long list of their debts and the coolies were left to beg and plead for release, but without any effect. They were forced to stay on to pay off their debts and thus became the slaves of the tea planters. This treatment became more and more unbearable, but they were so ignorant that they could not even form a labour union. Even their so-called wages were extremely low. Under the circumstances, they were left completely despondent and hopeless.

The non-cooperation movement at this time was in full swing in the rest of India. The Congress workers heard of the appalling condition of the coolies in the tea gardens and penetrated into this dark area of slavery to preach freedom. The oppressed saw in them a ray of hope and their hearts instantly began to respond to the call of freedom. This upset the planters who tried to stop the Congress workers. The awakened coolies, however, could no longer be kept

under control and in May 1921 one of the biggest strikes in the history of tea gardens took place with serious repercussions. Thousands upon thousands of these coolies decided to pack up their meagre belongings and return to their villages. They would rather beg than work in slavery and they were quite determined to leave. The Agents argued that the coolies were bound by legal bonds for a certain period and that they could not leave before that period had ended. They were threatened with legal action. But the surge of freedom could not be stopped. In desperation, the employers went to Karimgunj Railway Station and told the Station Master not to "aid and abet an illegal act" by selling tickets. As a result, the coolies could not buy tickets to return home. They, therefore, started walking to Chandpur Ghat. At this stage, the Karimgunj Congress sent an urgent telegram to Jatindra Mohan and Akhil Chandra Datta, leader of Comilla, asking them to visit Karimgunj. Jatindra Mohan went without delay and, hearing the sad stories, he sent urgent telegrams to the Agent and Traffic Manager of the Assam Bengal Railway.

Of all the Railway Companies in Eastern India, the employees of the Assam Bengal Railway were said to be the lowest paid. It was alleged that no consideration was given to their poor condition and there was great distress from Tinsukia in the heart of Assam to Chittagong. Jatindra Mohan's attention had been called to these sad conditions at the very beginning of the Non-cooperation Movement and the Assam Bengal Railway Union was formed by the Indian employees, with Jatindra Mohan as its President. The Union began to collect information about the various grievances and needs of the employees with the object of placing them before the authorities concerned.

Jatindra Mohan's urgent telegrams asking for tickets to be sold to the stranded coolies enabled a large number of

them to travel by train to Chandpur Ghat. A group of them boarded a steamer and came to Goalundo. When they reached Goalundo, the coolies found that the Ghat was surrounded by the Police. The coolies refused to return despite the entreaties of the Agents who now presented their contracts to the Police. Even then, the coolies refused to return. The District Magistrate and the Police Superintendent of Faridpur were also present. In the meantime, the District Magistrate of Sylhet had issued a notice under Section 144 Cr.P.C. in order to gag the public and this order was in operation within seven miles of the tea gardens of the District. Large numbers of coolies were forcibly sent by train from Karimgunj to Chandpur where they were left in a destitute condition. Though the local people looked after them for a time, their repatriation became a problem as enough money could not be raised from the local people to feed and care for so large a number. As many as 4,000 coolies remained in Chandpur. Many more had reached Goalundo by then. A European representative of the Tea Association of Assam came to Chandpur and, with the help of the S.D.O., tried to induce the coolies to return to work. By now quite alarmed, the coolies tried to leave Chandpur by boarding a steamer bound for Goalundo. The authorities, it was alleged, removed the gangway and many fell into the river. The coolies were then driven to the Railway Station and housed in the Railway shed where the local Congress volunteers distributed rice and water to them. Thousands of coolies, with their families also, slept in the open. Suddenly, late at night, all the lights were put out and Gurkha soldiers, it was alleged, were ordered to charge the sleeping coolies in the dark. It was said that they beat and kicked the coolies and about a hundred of them were injured. At last, the Commissioner and the S.D.O. had to ask the European commander of the Gurkhas to stop



the excesses, and a European official of the Railway even enquired why such cruel treatment had been meted out to the coolies. Public feeling grew against the authorities. Bengal was never stirred so much since the Amritsar tragedy as it was at this time and, in protest, there were *hartals* in Chandpur, Comilla, Chittagong and other places. The leader at Chandpur, Hardayal Nag, sent a long message by urgent telegram to Jatindra Mohan who arrived immediately in Chandpur. He at once arranged for collection of money and relief for the unfortunate victims.

In the meantime, the news had spread from Chittagong to Tinsukia and the Railway workers felt that they should strike in sympathy with the coolies. They had their own grievances too, and the news of the treatment of the coolies acted as a spark to a heap of gunpowder. The Chandpur tragedy happened on the night of May 20, 1921 and the Railway workers struck work on May 24 at Chandpur and Laksham—an important junction. No one in particular was responsible. The strike was spontaneous and took place without any prior planning. The Railway Union at Chittagong, the headquarters of the Railway, met on May 25. After deep consideration, the Union announced its sympathy and declared a general strike to last till the repatriation of the coolies was arranged by the Government. The strike spread to the steamers and all the *sarongs* and *khalasis* of the ships plying between Chandpur, Narayan-gunj and Goalundo refused to work, immobilising all ships. The Secretary of the *Sarongs'* Association, M. Abdul Majid, was arrested. Jatindra Mohan was the President of the Assam Bengal Railway Employees' Association; he declared that the strike was caused by the midnight attack in the station by Gurkhas on the helpless sleeping coolies and also due to their low wages as compared to the wages on other Railways. In the meantime, the sufferings of the coolies in

Chandpur increased as cholera broke out. They had to stay on for a number of days and many died. The local Congress Committee organised relief measures and sent doctors and medicines to help the victims. The spread of the epidemic was checked. Later, the coolies were put into boats and sent home.

Jatindra Mohan was not responsible for starting the Assam Bengal Railways strike as he was travelling at the time of its declaration; but he probably would have given his consent if he had been contacted at Chittagong. He, however, accepted the responsibility for the strike and began to organise and guide it. It was the first time in India that a strike had been declared to voice the grievances of the employees. Jatindra Mohan staked everything on its success. By May 27, when the Steamer Service men went on strike, the whole transport system by water and land was closed. Chittagong town went on *hartal*. Due to Jatindra Mohan's efforts, the strikers were wholly peaceful. He had arranged communications to be carried on by cycle-post and a water transport system had been set up to help the strikers.

The strike was a long one and Jatindra Mohan gave liberally to feed the poor strikers and incurred a heavy debt. Yet when it ended, many criticised him for its length. Later, however, the people realised his own personal sacrifice in giving so much financial aid and thanked him. About 25,000 employees had joined the strike, and this unprecedented combined action reflected a new spirit of self-sacrifice and patriotism. Never had the people of Bengal taken joint action before. The employees who were once frightened of their masters now became fearless and bold. Only European-driven transport or those escorted by the Police now functioned, but there was no violence because of Jatindra Mohan's peaceful methods. Many of the strikers were eject-

ed from their jobs. But the strike could not be broken. The Merchants' Association then began to intercede and their representatives went to see Mr. Noland, the Railway's Agent, but he refused to make any compromise.

The strike had continued for some days when Jatindra Mohan began to realise that if it went on and the large number of employees remained idle, something unpleasant might happen. Some constructive work had to be organised and he converted a school, which his father Jatra Mohan had started, into a camp. Hundreds of *charkhas* and hand-looms were distributed and the strikers began to spin and weave. This caused a great sensation. But the Congress and the public could ill-afford to feed and clothe the strikers any longer. Jatindra Mohan gave out money twice a week, but no one seemed to wonder from where the money came or why he was responsible. Jatindra Mohan himself began to feel harassed and worried as, on the one hand, he had to collect the money and on the other he had to conduct the strike; but he was determined to sacrifice his all to relieve the suffering of the strikers. As a result, he pledged all his landed property and incurred a debt of Rs. 40,000. When the strike was at its height, the Government came forward to help the Railway authorities, and the Police Chief served an order under Section 144 on Jatindra Mohan and his workers that they must not hold meetings for a month. Jatindra Mohan thought it would be prudent to obey this order; but in a week the oppression become more and more harsh. The strikers were forced to vacate their quarters, but all their personal belongings were kept back. So, the Congress Committee ordered the men to take away their belongings. When they reached Pahartali, they were arrested. Jatindra Mohan was most perturbed and, in consultation with his colleagues, decided to break the Police order by taking out a procession in defiance of the ban.

## CHAPTER VIII

### OPEN DEFIANCE

The procession was announced forty-one days after the commencement of the strike. The Superintendent of Police felt that there may be a breach of peace and decided to control it. But Jatindra Mohan proceeded with his arrangements for the procession. Those who were not afraid of being arrested were invited to join, and from dawn that day, groups of people began to collect. On July 21, 1921, six to seven thousand people had gathered for the procession. Jatindra Mohan asked the people whether they were prepared, if necessary, to be beaten and arrested. The gathering in one voice signified their assent. Jatindra Mohan said : "We shall conduct this procession and make it an all-faiths affair. It will go around Sikh and Hindu temples and the Jama Masjid. Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs will offer prayers at their respective places of worship, but the Police have prohibited the procession. Probably they will create trouble and the procession will be considered illegal. You will be beaten, ill-treated and imprisoned. You will have to bear this silently. Those who can stand up to all this should join and those in doubt should not . . . . .". The entire gathering assented, and not a single person abandoned the gathering. After this, the procession started with Jatindra Mohan and Mahim Chandra Das was at its head. It was a mile-long procession when it started moving. As it progressed, anxious crowds gathered in large masses and watched it. It gradually grew bigger and bigger. Slowly, it passed the Sikh and Hindu temples. When it approach-

ed the Jama Masjid near the Khastgir English High School for Girls, the District Magistrate and the Chief of Police, with about 50 Gurkha soldiers, came and stood in front of the procession.

The Magistrate warned the crowd; but not a single person dispersed. At the District Magistrate's orders, Jatindra Mohan, Mahim Chandra and fifteen others were arrested. The others were asked to disperse, but when no one moved, the District Magistrate asked the Gurkhas to break up the procession. Mr. Cornish, the Superintendent of Police, took the arrested people away. In pouring rain, the leaders were taken to the jail.

Bail was offered but Jatindra Mohan refused to sign any bond. The trial was to take place later that evening and the excited populace gathered around the jail gate. There were thousands and no one could control so great a crowd. Shouts of "Jatindra Mohan ki jai", "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai", "Bande Mataram", "Allah-ho-Akbar" resounded. The jail authorities were now quite worried and, in order to calm the crowd, placed a chair in front of the jail gate and asked Jatindra Mohan to sit there. This excited the crowd even more, but they calmed down when they saw that no harm had come to their leader. The crowd followed him to the Court where he was to be tried. When Jatindra Mohan and his followers were taken inside the Court, the crowd also moved in. A large force of Gurkha troops stopped the crowd from entering the Court. When the trial commenced, Jatindra Mohan declared that the order under which the arrests had been made was illegal and charged that, after the arrest, they were kept without food for the whole day. Those who witnessed this scene were greatly moved. Slogans were shouted and it was difficult for the Judge to proceed. At last, the Judge asked Jatindra Mohan to go to the window of the Court room and

ask the crowd to be quiet. He appeared once more before the adulating assembly, as he had done at the jail gate; as if by a miracle, instant peace prevailed. Seeing the magical influence of Jatindra Mohan on the crowd, even the British officers in the Court room were astounded and praised the arrested "criminal" on his excellent leadership and the discipline he could command.

The Judge then asked Jatindra Mohan to seek bail under his personal undertaking, which he refused. This was on a Saturday. The trial was to be continued on Monday, July 4, and Jatindra Mohan spend the week-end in jail. The entire town of Chittagong was now on *hartal* and people from countless neighbouring villages flocked to Chittagong on hearing of the arrest of their beloved leader and his trial. Thousands offered prayers in temples and mosques for the welfare of Jatindra Mohan and the other leaders. Milling crowds from the neighbouring districts of Noakhali and Tripura came to Chittagong to hear the trial, and the trees and the entire ground around the court were crammed with anxious people. The river Karnaphuli was jammed with *sampans* and hundreds of persons kept arriving from distant places. The police could not control the huge crowds. The noise was so great that the proceedings of the trial could not be heard clearly even inside the Court-room.

In Calcutta, Deshbandhu C. R. Das had been following the events in Chittagong with great anxiety, and he had been sending many telegrams to Jatindra Mohan. He now sent a final telegram advising Jatindra Mohan to accept bail, as he was obviously afraid that violence would break out if the leader was not free to calm the excited and angry crowds. It was now evident that only by being free could Jatindra maintain peace and non-violence. Reluctantly, despite the other leaders being unwilling to accept bail, Jatindra

Mohan consented to sign a personal bond. At 11 A.M. on July 5, the leaders were released. They were received outside amidst shouts of "Bande Mataram" and "Jatindra Mohan ki jai." But dissensions arose among the crowd as to whether Jatindra Mohan had been right in following Deshbandhu's advice. But he had only consented to sign the bond because he feared an outbreak of violence if he was not free himself to calm the crowd.

After his release, a meeting was held at the Muslim Hall where large crowds gathered. Here, Jatindra Mohan addressed the people from the terrace and advised them to be calm and non-violent. He told them that neither he nor the other leaders, nor those who were following him had ever caused any breach of peace, but that it was due to the action of the rulers alone that any agitation had been evident. He urged them to follow Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of peace and non-violence.

This meeting was presided over by Jatindra Mohan's wife, Nellie Sengupta. She had gallantly carried on the work of the Congress during her husband's absence in jail. A large purse was presented to Jatindra Mohan at the meeting for the relief of the strikers. There was now to be peace for three months, the period for which the bond had been signed by Jatindra Mohan. In the meantime, Jatindra Mohan and his wife went to Calcutta to collect money for the relief of the strikers.

Jatindra Mohan started his campaign at Barisal. Its leader, Aswini Kumar Dutt, who was a friend of Jatindra Mohan, embraced him and the populace gave him a big reception and blessed him as a leader of East Bengal.

The Railway authorities had started a recruiting centre to recruit new staff and thus smash the strike. Hundreds of people were recruited and sent to Chittagong and employed at different railway stations from Tinsukia to Chitta-

gong. This broke the morale of the strikers, and many of them thought of going back to work. The majority of those who wanted to resume work were not re-employed. The leaders of the strike were not taken back and lost their Provident Fund, bonus and other dues.

Mahatma Gandhi then decided to visit Chittagong and examine personally the working of the non-cooperation movement. He was touring India at the time with Maulana Mohammed Ali. When he reached Bengal, he was pleased with the excellent work which was being carried on in that province. The strike was still continuing when he decided to visit Chittagong. The people were very happy to hear of the Mahatma's intended visit. Even the shepherds began to shout "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai".

Elaborate arrangements were made and Jatindra Mohan decided that the reception was to be even better than that given to a Viceroy. Thousands of volunteers were recruited and they were trained for the visit. It was a hot day in September, and the volunteers were lined up for two miles between the Railway Station and Jatindra Mohan's house. As soon as the Mahatma's train arrived, the whole crowd shouted a welcome. Over two lakhs of people, dressed in spotless white khadi, had gathered to welcome Mahatma Gandhi. The Mahatma and Maulana Mohammed Ali were greatly impressed with the wonderful organisation and the discipline of the vast crowd. In appreciation, he wrote articles later in *Young India* entitled "Chittagong to the Fore" and "Chittagong Speaks" in which he praised this East Bengal town as a model of discipline. A meeting was held in the Gandhi Maidan where the Mahatma expressed his great appreciation of the people of Chittagong and asked other Indians to follow the example set by this East Bengal town.

After examining the problems caused by the strike,



Mahatma Gandhi came to a decision, but not all the strikers were satisfied with his programme. The Mahatma declared that those on strike had not made good use of their time. The majority of the strikers, during their months of idleness had been fed by their leaders and the Congress. They had felt that merely going on strike was enough and that they were contributing towards the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi condemned this attitude. Some of the strikers were even annoyed at the Mahatma's suggestion. He had firmly advised the people to take up some constructive national work, and if they could not do so, they might as well return to their jobs instead of being a drag on the country.

Those who remained idle now realised that they would no longer receive money. They started to think about the future and gradually all the lazy workers left the centre of the strike. There was to be no more dole for them. Also, Mahatma Gandhi with his magnetic personality had induced hundreds to work for the country and many now permanently abandoned their previous posts and joined the Non-cooperation Movement for life. Among these ardent souls was Kshitish Chandra Ganguli. Kshitish Babu was one of the Railway strikers who from this date became an ardent follower of Jatindra Mohan and an intimate friend right up to Jatindra Mohan's death in 1933. Later, he stood steadfast as the friend, adviser, guide and helper of the family.

A new programme was now inaugurated among the non-cooperators. Chittagong was renowned for the weaving of a kind of coarse cloth by both Muslims and Hindus. The women used to spin the yarn. Brahmins used to spin special yarn for their sacred thread. When Mahatma Gandhi suggested spinning as the main occupation which was to keep the people from being idle, he felt he was reviving the old village craft. But now, there was new vigour in the art of spinning and weaving. An organisation called the Saras-

wat Institution opened a branch in Chittagong and sent out batches of young people to the districts to train volunteers for producing khadi. The old industry had actually been flagging at this time, and now received a new infusion of energy. Old instruments were repaired and the professional as well as amateur weavers were encouraged to produce more hand-spun cloth.

Mahatma Gandhi's visit cast its magic spell over the people of Chittagong. With Jatin and other leaders at the helm, it soon became a strong centre of the non-violent freedom struggle of India.

## CHAPTER IX

### FIRST IMPRISONMENT

On September 24, 1921, the period of the bond which Jatindra Mohan had signed under the instructions of Desh-bandhu came to an end. The leaders of Chittagong had been bound under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. On September 26, a large gathering of workers and the public gathered at Jatindra Mohan's house to celebrate the end of the restriction imposed on their leaders. A happy evening of singing was arranged and a large crowd was engrossed in listening to a *Sankirtan* of "Nimaisanyasa" which Jatindra Mohan was greatly enjoying, when all at once a posse of policemen arrived and arrested him. The warrant stated that Jatindra Mohan had been deeply involved in the Pahartali riots and he was, therefore, charged under Sections 109, 111 and 147 of the Indian Penal Code. He rejected the offer of bail and was taken to prison. Asking his co-workers to continue working for the freedom struggle, he strongly urged them to remain non-violent.

After Jatindra Mohan's arrest, arrangements were made to carry on constructive work, and the younger leaders continued the programme of spinning and the popularisation of khadi and boycott of foreign cloth. Nellie Sengupta took part in this campaign with great enthusiasm and, under her leadership, much progress was made. Soon, Nellie was served with a prohibitory order under Section 144 of Cr. P.C., and she was asked to stop her activities. But she refused to

obey the order and continued her work. She wrote to the District Magistrate :

“Dear Sir,

A Police Officer handed me last evening a typed notice bearing Section 144 Cr.P.C. at the top and your signature at the bottom, telling me that you are satisfied on police report that I was obstructing traffic, selling and purchasing of foreign cloth and collecting crowds and asking me therefore to desist from this act. I do not understand what your Section 144 means. I challenge the proof of the allegations made against me and also most emphatically declare the report as mischievously false. I am indeed shocked at the absolute demoralisation of your Police Officer and his wanton disregard for truth and fair dealing. I went out this morning to a bazar to see if I could appeal to my fellow-citizens here to sell and purchase their own country-made cloth. I created no riot, no traffic was obstructed, and we were peacefully prosecuting our work with no interruption from any quarter. No shop-keeper murmured, no purchaser grumbled at our conduct. No crowd collected. It was the Police who were disturbing the people by their frequent visits. One Police Officer arrested a boy who was with me for no reason whatsoever, and when I protested against this misconduct on the part of the police and asked him to arrest me as I had brought the boy with me, the Police Officer threatened me and I presume, true to his words, this Officer ran to you with a concocted story and came back in the evening with a notice signed by you. It is a sin to request people to patronise their home industry? Is it a crime to ask the shop-keepers to exhibit country-made products to attract the

notice of purchasers? Is the law in India so destructive for her industry?"

The trial of Jatindra Mohan and the other leaders began on October 4, 1921. He was offered bail but he refused and he also averred that there was no legal evidence against his arrest and he must be discharged. The Police could not produce the desired evidence to convict the leaders at the time and they were released. But their arrest caused great indignation and Ramananda Chatterjee, the Editor of the *Modern Review* wrote :

"The arrest of the leading citizens of Chittagong like Mr. J. M. Sen Gupta, Barrister-at-Law, without the local authorities being able to formulate a single charge against them, prosecutions and persecutions of men, who organise perfectly legal labour strikes or speak out their minds against official oppression in all parts of the country, demonstrate that in spite of the reforms, we stand where we did."

Though Jatindra Mohan was released without a bond or bail and the Court adjourned the case *sine die*, he was again put on trial on October 20. With seventeen other leaders, he was convicted under Section 151 I.P.C. and Section 32 of the Police Act for leading a procession and sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment. This caused widespread disturbances and Jatin and the other arrested leaders were removed from the local jail on the very evening of their conviction. A large crowd followed the prisoners to the Railway station. Peace prevailed until the crowd reached the station when the Gurkhas suddenly attacked and a severe blow fell on Babu Aparna Chandra Kanungo who was seriously wounded. The Gurkhas now charged with the butt ends of their rifles, and according to a Congress enquiry made later, 104 people were injured. When the leaders arrived in Calcutta, they were given a great reception at the station. Nellie travelled to Calcutta in the same train and

was met by her brother-in-law, Ranendra Mohan. The Anglo-Indian Police Officer in charge of the prisoners escorted Jatindra Mohan to his Calcutta home for the night and took him to Alipore Central Jail early next morning. For allowing Jatindra Mohan to spend a night in his home, this Police Officer was severely censured by the Government. This was Jatindra Mohan's first conviction, but he had to spend many weary months in prison later.

An amusing incident took place while Jatindra Mohan was in jail. An Anglo-Indian prisoner, released after a term for cheating, came to the Senguptas' house and confided to them that he knew they were taking cigars and a few small luxuries to the leader. He said there may be some fear of their being caught and that he, as a jail official, would be able safely to take the things to Jatindra Mohan. He took the cigars and some money to pay for the taxi. Ranendra Mohan had innocently given these to him, only to find later that the so-called "jail official" was a recently released convict. This caused much amusement and Jatindra Mohan, always seeing the humour in a situation, burst out laughing when he heard of the petty fraud played on his young brother.

Months of conflict and agitation followed, for the Prince of Wales chose to visit India at this time to keep up the prestige of the British Empire. While, on the one hand, boycotts and arrests took place, on the other, the Congress continued its constructive programme. Suchia, a village near Barama, was once famous for weaving khadi. This home-spun material was sold at a high price in Calcutta, and so the constructive wing of the Congress gave the Suchia Spinning and Weaving Centre a new life. A large number of spinners now became active members of the Suchia Centre. From them the *jolas* or weavers took the yarn for weaving khadi in large quantities. 'Suchia Khaddar' became so

famous that it drew the attention of the Khadi Pratisthan of Calcutta. Suchia was made a branch of the Khadi Pratisthan which supplied Suchia with cotton.

The time was now ripe for a fresh agitation. The visit of the Prince of Wales caused a *hartal* in Calcutta as also in other parts of India. The Prince arrived in India on November 17, 1921, and it was felt that his arrival was ill-timed since there was so much dissatisfaction and trouble in the country. A *hartal* was organised in Calcutta and thousands of people emerged from their homes merely to see if it was working satisfactorily. Volunteers of the Congress and the Khilafat movement conducted the *hartal*. The streets were full of policemen even though the *hartal* was perfectly peaceful. In fact, the success of the *hartal* created much concern among the British authorities. In order to crush this united popular action, the rulers felt that they had to make all peaceful demonstrations look as if they were violent. The Government, therefore, declared the volunteer organisations of the Congress and the Khilafat movement illegal. On November 19, search parties went round and, throughout the city, people were arrested. Section 144 was promulgated and meetings and processions banned. Deshbandhu C. R. Das directed the volunteers to sell khadi and conduct *pharis* in groups. A large number of them were arrested, including Deshbandhu's only son, Chiraranjit. Basanti Devi and Deshbandhu's sister, Urmila Devi, also sold khadi in the streets and were arrested, but soon released. These arrests only increased the fervour of the people and thousands of people started selling khadi in the streets. Jatindra Mohan's youngest brother also took up this work as Jatin was still in prison. Deshbandhu was arrested on December 12, 1921. Many of his co-workers went to jail with him. The jails were now so overcrowded that some of the non-political prisoners—regular criminals—had

to be released to make room for the political "culprits".

When Deshbandhu was incarcerated in Alipore Jail, Lord Reading, the Viceroy, came to Calcutta, for the Prince of Wales' visit to Calcutta was due on December 25. He wanted to try and stop the agitation and boycott. He called on Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to intercede with Deshbandhu. Mahatma Gandhi was then consulted and he insisted that all Civil Disobedience prisoners should first be released. Deshbandhu also insisted on the same condition which the Viceroy would not accept. The Round Table Conference, proposed to be held in March 1922, was therefore, cancelled. In the meantime, the Prince arrived in Calcutta at the end of December, as scheduled, and was welcomed with a mighty *hartal* and mass civil disobedience. The annual Congress session met in Ahmedabad at this time and Deshbandhu was elected the President while he was in prison. In his absence, the Conference was conducted by Hakim Ajmal Khan. Deshbandhu's portrait was placed on the Presidential chair. Sarojini Naidu read Deshbandhu's speech so eloquently that it was felt as if Deshbandhu himself was present.

Two months later, in February 1922, Deshbandhu was tried and convicted for preaching sedition. He did not defend himself. By this time, Jatindra Mohan had been released. He was now a member of the Congress Working Committee. In April 1922, when Deshbandhu was still in prison, people wondered who would act for him. Jatindra Mohan was still a young man, though he had achieved great popularity in Bengal and was much loved in Chittagong. He had recently been given the title of "Deshapriya". It was his desire that the Provincial Conference of the Congress should be held at Chittagong and he made a proposal to this effect. There was some opposition, but it was finally accepted. He started preparations for building the rostrum



for the Conference at Chittagong. He was elected Chairman of the Reception Committee and Basanti Devi, Deshbandhu's wife, was to preside.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CHITTAGONG CONFERENCE

Jatindra Mohan was so well loved and respected in Chittagong that whatever he said was taken as an order. In spite of his popularity, many co-workers expressed their doubts about the success of the Conference at a time when the British were persecuting the Congress so harshly. All the leaders were now in prison and Mahatma Gandhi, after his historic trial on March 18, 1922, had been convicted for six years' imprisonment. Jatindra Mohan himself, just released from jail, proceeded with the preparations for the Conference by collecting money, enrolling volunteers and arranging for other necessary items. The workers now began a new life and the people of Chittagong joined with enthusiasm. However, two mishaps occurred, which caused a feeling of uncertainty. It was the time of nor'westers and a great storm completely razed to the ground the huge platform and gallery which had been constructed for the Conference. The boundary-wall of corrugated iron sheets also fell down just a week before the scheduled time. The contractors felt that they could not rebuild the pandal and the boundary-wall in a week. Jatindra Mohan was away on a fund-collecting mission to Arakan and he was sent for. When he arrived, there were only three days left. The postponement of the Conference became almost inevitable and Jatindra Mohan was faced with a problem—should he postpone the meeting and thereby suffer a defeat or should he fight the misfortune? He summoned a well-known contractor and said "We have called you to do a job. You will get the money and I do not want to hear a

'no' ". Feeling inspired by Jatindra Mohan's earnestness, the contractor agreed to do the impossible for the glory of Chittagong. Jatindra Mohan jumped up, embraced the contractor and remarked : "Let us work together." The contractor said he would charge only the labour costs. An hour later, the parade ground was filled with thousands of labourers. They shouted patriotic slogans and worked round the clock. Everything was ready just an hour or two before the time of the Conference. Jatindra Mohan naturally felt very grateful to the contractor who proved to be a national benefactor. He was Aparanna Charan Kanungo. A small group of people, opposed to Jatindra, were, however not, pleased with his success.

Patriotic slogans and singing of "Bande Mataram" soon unnerved the authorities and the Police served an order on the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Jatindra Mohan, banning the singing of "Bande Matram". Some felt that the order should be ignored, while other feared that the Conference would be broken up by the authorities if they shouted slogans. Jatindra Mohan felt very depressed, and he decided to discuss the matter with the delegates. His opponents criticised him for taking this decision, but Jatindra Mohan felt that he had asked leaders from all over Bengal to attend the Conference and it was not proper that a prohibitory order should stop the Conference. The volunteers were asked not to shout slogans. The railway strike was still continuing in a desultory manner and Basanti Devi was due to arrive as President of the Conference in Chittagong. The ship bringing the delegates was to arrive with her. When it entered the Karnaphuli river, all the members of the Reception Committee lined up on the quay, but the crowd remained silent. The delegates on the ship could not understand why they were not welcomed with Congress slogans and some of them shouted

out "Bande Mataram". There was no response from the shore and the delegates on the ship became more and more puzzled. Many even felt insulted and the ship halted in mid-stream. Jatindra Mohan then got into a boat and went to the steamer with a few of his co-workers. Reaching the ship, he explained that he had taken the responsibility of not disobeying the Government order pending consultations with the delegates. He said that, if they felt that "Bande Mataram" should be shouted, he would lead in doing so. The younger delegates said they could not accept such an insulting and humiliating order and that they would not attend the Conference. The more mature felt that this was not the occasion to defy the order and Basanti Devi agreed. All the delegates went quietly ashore, but the younger group accepted the situation with reluctance. When they came ashore, a huge police force was standing behind the crowd. This created more resentment; but, at the request of Basanti Devi, everyone kept calm. The silent procession resembled a funeral. The complete hush was almost uncanny. Such behaviour seemed almost like timid obedience to an uncalled-for order. Jatindra Mohan thought he had decided wrongly and that he should have insisted on shouting the usual freedom slogans. And yet, if he had done so, all the delegates would probably have been arrested, and there would have been no session of the Conference in Chittagong. This meeting actually did much to raise the prestige of the East Bengal seaport and allowed the people to air their views.

Jatindra Mohan, as Chairman of the Reception Committee, delivered a remarkable speech which marked him as one of the coming orators of India. After welcoming the delegates, he said that most of the great leaders, who would undoubtedly have been more worthy than him to preside over the Reception Committee, were now in jail.

He continued : "It is no use denying the fact that I have felt keenly their absence from amongst us while engaged in preparations for holding the Conference. Without them, it was felt at one time that it would be impossible to hold the Conference this year in Chittagong. Then, years ago, at this very spot, my late father, Srijut Jatra Mohan, performed the duty that I am entrusted with today; and the determination to hold the Conference with him gone away from us and all our best workers in jail could be rightly described at least as ambitious, if not fool-hardy. I therefore ask you to forgive us for the imperfect arrangements that have been made for your reception and comfort during your short stay."

Though Chittagong had been going through troubled times for the last one year, the leaders had done their best to accomplish some form of constructive work in the face of great odds. Instead of 50,000 members of the Congress which Chittagong could have enrolled, there were only 36,000. The Tilak Swarajya Fund had also fallen short of the required amount because the labour strikers and other local activities had cost the people over 50,000 rupees. But they had succeeded in putting into use 18,000 *charkhas* and 16,000 looms. Although Chittagong went through very difficult times, it had tried its best not to lag behind the other districts of Bengal in the fulfilment of national work. Chittagong was among the first towns in Bengal to face repression by the Government. Worthy leaders had been given severe and long jail sentences. Even from among the Congressmen, there had been objections as to the propriety of holding the Conference at a time of crisis, and it was felt that time, money and energy could be "better employed in the constructive programme laid down by the Congress." The objectors also said that there was depression in the country and people did not

understand what the Congress programme stood for in the economic context. To these objections, Jatin replied : "I thought the only way to get everyone of our workers and followers to realise that there was no occasion for despair, was by holding the annual conference as usual and acquainting the whole country, through its representatives present at the meeting, with the true meaning of the constructive programme laid down for us; and if there was depression in the country, was it likely to be less or more if our ordinary activities were suspended ?"

As regards 'boycott' and 'Swadeshi', the object of the Congress, Jatindra Mohan said, was not so much to hurt Lancashire or England in particular as to foster the local industries for growth towards self-sufficiency. He said : "It would be sin to boycott foreign ideas and goods which do good for us, as for instance knowledge, science, machinery and inventions of foreign countries. Let me not be misunderstood. I certainly think that we should avoid using foreign things that do no good to us or which can be procured in our country. There is not the slightest doubt that our efforts should be directed towards the development of our industries so that gradually all foreign goods, which are generally used by the people, disappear from our homes."

The light of the Congress, Jatindra Mohan pointed out, was directed only against evil things. It was neither vicious nor did it hate. Mahatma Gandhi had wiped out all hatred from his non-violent movement. He merely thought of the greatest good of his country and felt that Indians must not hate the British or look down upon them as the alien bureaucratic Government was inclined to do at them. Gandhiji pointed out that Indians could not accuse the British of discrimination between the different classes so long as they themselves practised untouchability. He had

said : "I feel that we will never attain freedom unless the curse of untouchability and the caste system, as at present it is in India, is wholly removed."

In his address, Jatindra Mohan then went on to speak of the need for perfect discipline. The leaders had to keep the masses from becoming violent even though it was not possible to make every Indian a saint. All the leaders, including the Mahatma, were in jail. Jatin said : "My firm belief is that to accept a system which has to imprison for its existence all the best, would be to deny the existence of God and to admit that evil and untruth will crush for ever truth and God." He entreated the people to foster the Nature of Love or *Bishnu Prakriti* as against destruction or *Rudra Prakriti*. He himself was always a constructor, a builder of the nation, and his heart abounded with love.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SWARAJ PARTY

Three months after the Chittagong Conference, Deshbandhu C. R. Das was released in July 1922. Gandhi was still in prison and the people were becoming despondent about non-cooperation. The strength behind the movement had slackened. An enquiry committee was, therefore, set up to assess the progress of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Soon after Deshbandhu's release, Motilal Nehru came to Calcutta and requested the leaders of Bengal not to express any public opinion regarding the situation before the publication of the report. It was published in a few days and it recommended that the country was not ready for Civil Disobedience, and a new programme was needed. Deshbandhu realised that this new programme should include entry into Legislatures and Councils, which would carry the fight inside the Government. He felt that non-cooperation was not strong enough to win freedom.

Jatindra Mohan, therefore, resumed his practice as he was now on the verge of starvation. He was criticised for this, but he had originally decided to give up practice only for three months, and it was now a year and a half. The Congress was now to accept entry to the Councils and he felt that there should be no objection if he were again to earn his living. Deshbandhu C. R. Das, stood staunchly by Jatindra Mohan and remarked that it was a misfortune for the country that Jatin was compelled to go back to work in order to survive. Some people opposed to Jatindra Mohan began openly to criticise him. They even held a meeting and tore up his picture.



The Swaraj Party was born in Calcutta when Pandit Motilal Nehru moved the following resolution :

“Whereas the working of the Legislative Councils during their first term has, besides proving a serious impediment to the redress of the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs and speedy attainment of Swaraj, caused great misery and hardship to the people, and whereas it is desirable that steps should be taken in strict accordance with the principles of non-violent non-cooperation to avoid recurrence of the evil, it is resolved, with reference to the report of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee that this Committee should recommend to the Indian National Congress that non-cooperators should contest the elections on the issue of redress of Punjab and Khilafat wrongs and immediate attainment of Swaraj and make endeavours to be returned in a majority.”

Jatindra Mohan supported this resolution and dealt categorically with the objections the opposers had voiced. “He thought there was no difficulty about asking the electorate to vote for the non-cooperators if the latter explained that they followed the mandate of the Congress and wanted to see that the people were not oppressed. He considered that there was reasonable expectation that the non-cooperators would obtain a majority. In dealing with the argument that there should be no talk of changing the programme so long as Mahatma Gandhi and others were in jail, S. J. Sengupta reminded the opponents of the resolution that Mahatma Gandhi had told them not to consider persons inside the jail when taking action on behalf of those outside, and Mahatma Gandhi would be the first to blame them if they did so. It had been said that standing for Councils was co-operation, but what they had to look to was the intention behind it.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan. Op. Cit. pp. 31, 32.*

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya moved a motion to postpone the resolution till the annual session which was to be held in Gaya in December 1922. There were now two parties within the Congress. The No-changers and the Pro-changers. Both sides became a little bitter. The election of delegates to the Congress was now held amid great excitement. Deshbandhu, Motilal Nehru, Jatindra Mohan and others had to resign their seats in the Provincial Congress Committees and were ridiculed. The newly formed A.I.C.C. was composed mostly of the No-changers; the others, though led by Deshbandhu, were in a minority. The Congress met at Gaya on December 26, 1922, and Deshbandhu in his presidential address spoke in favour of 'Council Entry', but the resolution of Motilal Nehru was rejected. Deshbandhu now resigned his Presidentship and formed a new party named the Congress-Khilafat Swaraj Party which favoured Council Entry. His resignation was not accepted and Deshbandhu continued as nominal head of the Congress while he built up his own party inside the Congress. This new party did not secede from the Congress, but worked hard to reconstruct its strength and become the majority from a very small minority. Deshbandhu and Jatindra Mohan carried on an insistent propaganda programme and, at a special session held at Delhi, the Swaraj Party programme was permitted by the Congress, though boycott was also maintained. Mahatma Gandhi sent a message from prison to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who had been released. It ran as follows :

"I do not want you to stick to my programme. I am not for the entire programme. But, if, looking at the state of the country, you think that one or two items in the boycott programme should be discarded or modified or added to, then in the name of love of the country I command you

to give up those parts of my programme or alter them accordingly."

The Delhi Congress then gave permission for Congress members to contest the Council and Assembly elections, and the Swarajists immediately emerged into power. They were returned to the Councils and voters took a much healthier interest in the elections than had hitherto been the case. Jatindra Mohan became the Secretary of the Bengal Swaraj Party. A campaign now began in connection with the elections to the Bengal Legislative Council and Jatindra Mohan entered the field as Deshbandhu's chief worker. By this time, Deshbandhu had established the newspaper *Forward* for helping the party. Under the editorship of Mr. P. K. Chakravarti, the paper voiced the aims and objects of the Swaraj Party. Fifty-seven Hindu and Muslim candidates were nominated for election to the Bengal Council from the Swaraj Party. Jatindra Mohan was nominated from the Chittagong Hindu Constituency. The Swaraj Party was now an established force.

## CHAPTER XII

### BENGAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

During the elections held in November 1923, 40 Swarajists were elected. Their victory caused some surprise. Pleader Ananda Charan Datta contested against Jatin in the Council elections, but was defeated. A number of small parties were formed in the Legislative Council. Deshbandhu came to a working agreement with the National Party. The Moderate Party, the Muslim group and the nominated members of the Council were the others. Deshbandhu was successful in making a Hindu-Muslim Pact. This helped the Swarajists in their efforts to thwart the Government's attempts to form a stable Ministry. At this time, the Congress had decided to fight for the seats in the Calcutta Corporation as well. Though Jatindra Mohan did not stand as a candidate, he was, apart from being Secretary of the Swaraj Party, the Secretary of the Congress Municipal Association. He was also the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. In these three assignments, he established himself as Deshbandhu's right hand man. Whenever Deshbandhu was ill, Jatindra Mohan acted as the leader in the Legislative Council and in matters concerning the Corporation. Many Congressmen were now presidents of municipalities, and Deshbandhu became the first Mayor of Calcutta. In other States, Vithalbhai Patel became the President of the Bombay Corporation and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel the President of the Ahmedabad Municipality. Deshbandhu wanted to bring to an end the system of dyarchy.

Lord Lytton invited Deshbandhu to Government House

to talk about the Swaraj Party forming a Ministry. Deshbandhu considered this offer, but after a time refused it. Lord Lytton had appointed Surendranath Mullick, A. K. Ghaznavi and Fazlul Haq as Ministers. At this time, Surendranath Haldar had filed a petition questioning the validity of Mr. Mullick being elected. This petition was allowed and Mr. Mullick lost his seat. Later, he was given a job in the India Office. On March 24, 1924, the question of Ministers' salaries was put before the Council. The proposal was defeated by 69 votes to 63. Lord Lytton tried repeatedly to get a Ministry accepted, but failed; the proposal was voted down every time. A pro-British paper published an editorial describing Deshbandhu as "India's evil genius".

The repeated success of the Swarajists in defeating the Government's attempts to form a Ministry resulted in the declaration by the Government on June 13, 1925, that dyarchy would remain suspended till January 1926 and that if, during this time, the Council sanctioned the salaries of Ministers, then it would be restored.

In August 1924, Lytton invited Jatindra Mohan—since Chittaranjan Das was ill—to discuss the formation of a Ministry. Jatindra Mohan told him that the Swarajists were opposed to dyarchy, though not to the Ministry as such. As long as the will of the people was not expressed through the Council, the Ministry could not be accepted.

The Government now realised that it would be impossible to carry on the work of the Legislative Council as long as the Swarajists remained in it. At this time, Subhas Chandra Bose, Anil Baran Roy, Satyendra Charan Mitra and other leaders were arrested and many other young leaders were ordered not to move out of certain areas. The Government was not satisfied with the powers it held under the Bengal Criminal Law (Amendment) Act. It introduced

the Ordinance Bill containing some very severe provisions of the Rowlett Act. On January 7, 1925, the Ordinance Bill came up for discussion in the Bengal Legislative Council. The Swarajists were determined to oppose it, but they did not possess enough voting strength to prevent the passage of the Bill as Subhas Bose, Anil Baran Roy and Satyendra Charan Mitra had already been arrested while other leaders were confined to their areas. These members had to be present in order to give the Swarajists the majority. Jatindra Mohan decided to write to the Secretary of the Legislative Council pointing out that he intended to move a motion at the meeting of the Bengal Legislative Council to be held on the January 7, 1925, that the evidence of these three gentlemen under detention, and of the other leaders who were restricted within certain areas, was necessary and that the Government should issue summonses on the said persons requiring their attendance at a time and place to be mentioned in such summonses as provided by Section I of the Bengal Legislative Council (Witnesses) Act of 1866 (being Act III of 1866).

Jatindra Mohan also wrote two other letters at this time—one to the Secretary of the Council saying he should postpone the Council meeting scheduled for January 7, and another to the President of the Council requesting approval for placing the resolution regarding the adjournment as it would not be possible to conduct the meeting without the three men under detention at the time. The President did not give the necessary permission for the adjournment, and the question of the jailed gentlemen attending the meeting could not therefore be raised. The Swarajist leaders, however, did not allow the matter to rest there. Deshbandhu was ill at the time, but, against the advice of his doctors, he came to Calcutta. He said that, as long as he was alive, he would fight against such an evil Bill. He could not let

youth leaders be arrested without trial.

The Council session was in progress when Deshbandhu arrived on a stretcher and held a detailed discussion with the other members. He said that he had come to beg for votes to oppose the vicious Bill which was known as the "Black Bill". When the voting took place, the Bill was defeated by many votes. This seemed to give new strength to Deshbandhu. But the triumph of the Swarajists was short-lived. Lord Lytton exercised his special powers and brought the Ordinance into force. Deshbandhu felt satisfied that he had proved at least that the Government was ruling without the will of the people.

The Swaraj Party also contested seats in the Calcutta Corporation which began to function in 1924. As already stated, Deshbandhu became the first Mayor. He was elected for a second term, but died on June 16, 1925. He was succeeded by Jatindra Mohan.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TRIPLE CROWN

Deshbandhu's death came as a great shock to the nation. There were now three important posts to be filled. They were : the Presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, the Presidentship of the Swaraj Party and the Mayorship of the Calcutta Corporation. Twelve days after Deshbandhu's death, a meeting of the Swaraj Party was called; it was attended by 400 members with B. K. Basu as Chairman. He asked for the nomination of a President and the names of Jatindra Mohan and Maulana Akram Khan were proposed. Later, Maulana Akram Khan withdrew and Jatindra Mohan was unanimously elected President. Mahatma Gandhi then arrived in Calcutta and spoke at the meeting. He was very pleased to see the right man elected as Deshbandhu's successor. He appealed to the members to give him full support.

The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee held a meeting on June 29 and two names were proposed for the Presidentship, those of Jatindra Mohan and Lalit Mohan Das. On the withdrawal of Lalit Mohan, Jatindra Mohan was declared to be the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee as well as of the Bengal Swaraj Party. In an editorial entitled "Hail the Leader", the *Forward* wrote :

The election of Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta as the President of the Bengal Swaraj Party and as the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, will give satisfaction to all—not only the members of the party and the Congress, but to the vast majority of



his countrymen. The unique honour which has been conferred on him, S<sup>j</sup>. Sen Gupta deserves fully; he has earned it. Caught in the swing of non-cooperation in March 1921, he suspended practice at a time, when, after years of hard struggle, he had just succeeded in making his mark in the profession. It was not a small sacrifice which S<sup>j</sup>. Sen Gupta made to serve his country. His intimate friends know the extent of the hardships and privations which he and his wife and children suffered most readily and gladly during the eighteen months he was out of the profession.

We recall these facts to impress on the public that S<sup>j</sup>. Sen Gupta has, in no small measure, the qualities which go to make a true leader of men. He has, in him, the spirit of sacrifice. He has also great tact, courage, power of organisation and an intimate knowledge of his countrymen which very few possess. He is undoubtedly now the most capable man for leading the Swaraj Party and the Congress in Bengal. Comparisons are always to be deprecated and more particularly at the present moment. For ourselves, we have no doubt that S<sup>j</sup>. Sen Gupta will lead the Party to victory. Occasions make the man. We assert with confidence that occasions will make S<sup>j</sup>. Sen Gupta the unchallenged leader of our people...

There was now one more position proposed for Jatindra Mohan—the Mayor of Calcutta. It was, however, not as easy to achieve as the other two. All the European papers and *the Bengalee* were opposed to him. Even the Congress Municipal Association was not unanimous in wanting him to succeed Deshbandhu. Some of the Congress Party men now approached the Mahatma. He told them that if Jatindra Mohan was fit for the Swaraj Party and the Congress, there could be no doubt of his capability to become

Mayor of Calcutta also, and if these three posts were held by one capable man, it would be the best thing for the Party. Finally, the Congress Municipal Association chose Jatindra Mohan as its candidate for the Mayorship. *The Bengalee* newspaper group continued a tirade against him and to show its antagonism, it published an article entitled "Intruder from Distant Chittagong". Jatindra Mohan was supported by the *Forward* which published an article entitled "The Next Mayor". The article ran as follows :—

The *Bengalee* and the Anglo-Indian Press are not sparing themselves in protesting against the candidature of S. J. M. Sen Gupta for the office of the Mayor. The vehemence with which they have expressed themselves would make 'the man in the moon' think as if the terrestrial system would bow up, if the 'enfant terrible' of the Swaraj Party became also the leader of the Calcutta Corporation. But it is now clear that the articles and paragraphs that have emanated from their venomous pen, couched in language not always indicative of good taste, represents, if at all, a very small section of Calcutta opinion. S. J. Sen Gupta has been, for over a fortnight, on the Mayoral *tapis*. Mahatma Gandhi seized the earliest opportunity to declare himself in his favour. The Executive Committee decided on the 9th instant that in view of the necessity for the unification of command, the Mayoralty should go to the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The decision was communicated and the latter accepted it by 31 votes to 6. These proceedings were not conducted *in camera* and the public came to know of them almost immediately. How is it that if the rate-payers are really against S. J. Sen Gupta, not a single representative meeting, so far as we know, has been called to record disapproval ? . . . . . It seems that

as a body the rate-payers are solidly behind him. They are shrewd enough to realise that the apparently harmless move for a non-political Mayor is a mere dodge to transfer power to an outside body...

It was questioned whether Jatindra Mohan would have the time to do the Mayor's work in addition to his other heavy duties. To this, the *Forward* answered: "We think that Mr. Sen Gupta is the best judge in the matter. The public should in all fairness give him the chance to make good....." Did the rate-payers of Calcutta "want to revert to the old rule of vested interests or did they want the Corporation to carry on the work of Deshbandhu?" Now was the time to decide.

Jatindra Mohan had first to be elected as Alderman before he could be elected as Mayor and his opposers tried to prevent this election. Three other candidates were proposed, but the majority of votes went to Jatin, who was elected Alderman on July 14, 1925.

The election of the Mayor was next taken up and Rai Bahadur Ramtaran Banerjee proposed Jatindra Mohan's name. He was seconded by Mr. M. A. Razzak and was opposed by a European member. Voting was then done and Jatindra Mohan obtained 52 votes, while the European got only 17. When the result was announced, there was great jubilation. Mr. Phelps, the leader of the European group, led Jatindra Mohan to the Mayoral chair. Mr. Phelps and others welcomed him in their speeches and the new Mayor replied as follows:—

Aldermen and Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation, I thank you most heartily for the signal honour of electing me as your Mayor after the passing away of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, your first Mayor. By his stupendous self-sacrifice, his great intellect, his power of organisation and, above all, by his great love

for his country and his incessant labour in that behalf he became one of the greatest benefactors of the country. I beseech you, therefore, in the largeness of your generosity to refrain from overwhelming my little self by comparing me with the great genius of my great leader.

Jatindra Mohan said that the honour conceded to him was not personal, but an appreciation of the work and the cause which Deshbandhu had pursued in the Corporation along with the Councillors. He then outlined some of the important objectives introduced by Deshbandhu. These were : (1) The establishment of free primary education; (2) Free medical relief for the poor; (3) Purer and cheaper food and milk supply; (4) Better supply of filtered and unfiltered water; (5) Better sanitation in bustees and congested areas; (6) Housing for the poor; (7) Development of the suburban areas; (8) Improved transit facilities; and (9) greater efficiency of administration at a cheaper cost. Jatindra Mohan promised faithfully to follow this programme and try to execute it although it would take time to accomplish. Much could not be done as long as the Chief Executive Officer, S. Subhas Chandra Bose was unexpectedly, unjustly and without any trial kept in prison. "Let him only be released and restored to the Corporation and, I have no doubt, our programme will be executed with increased expedition and re-doubled energy".

Jatindra Mohan then pointed out that he was essentially a politician and a member of the Indian National Congress, but he would not sacrifice the interests of the rate-payers for serving his party. He would approach all questions of the Corporation as a citizen and not as a politician, he assured them. He said that he could only work with the goodwill of the Councillors.

It was thought by many people at this time that Jatindra

Mohan was made the Mayor only because of the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, but though the Mahatma was in his favour, he had little to do directly or indirectly with the actual election. The following extracts from *Young India* of July 18, 1925, bring out Mahatma Gandhi's views :

Some friends in Bengal have resented my interference in the matter of the choice of the Mayor of Calcutta. Perhaps common courtesy requires an explanation from me. Whilst, after the national loss, I decided to stand by Bengal in her hour of greatest need and as far as was possible to wipe the tears and comfort Basanti Devi, as also the fatherless children, I had also decided not to force myself on any of them but humbly to hold myself at their disposal. It was a simple duty I owed to the memory of a departed friend and comrade. The inauguration of an All-Bengal Deshbandhu Memorial Fund, for which I was chiefly responsible, made my stay in Bengal peremptory. Events have justified the wisdom of my decision. But I had little expected that I would have to give advice or guidance in the selection of the Mayor of Calcutta in place of Deshbandhu. It was a task. I would gladly have avoided. But, for a soldier, there is often no choice. The matter was referred to me by parties interested in the selection and I could not shirk the responsibility, as I could not conscientiously plead incapacity. Having been drawn into the vortex, there was no escape from it, till the matter was formally decided by the Congress Municipal Association.

The Mahatma said that he gave the advice, which was best for the country and which Deshbandhu would have liked. For about four years, the policy of the Congress had been to capture the municipalities and local boards in order to foster a constructive programme. The idea was to

acquire stronger political power. There was nothing wrong in this. Even the London County Council had been known to fight on political issues. Mahatma Gandhi wrote : "Deshbandhu captured the Corporation of Calcutta to that end and used it most effectively for consolidation of the power of the Congress, or which is almost the same thing in Bengal, the Swaraj Party. Did he thereby neglect the interest of the Corporation ? I venture to say emphatically 'No'. On the contrary, his municipal ambition was as high as the political."

Mahatma Gandhi compared Jatindra Mohan's position with that of MacSwiney, who, as Mayor of Cork, worked not for personal honour but that he may wage the freedom struggle of Ireland better from his exalted position. The man who succeeded Deshbandhu possibly had to face greater danger. The Mahatma said: "MacSwiney put his life at stake. Deshbandhu's successor had to put his whole reputation at stake. The slightest deviation from the standard of sacrifice and honour bequeathed by Deshbandhu might blast his successor's reputation for life—a living death worse than the death of the mere body. Thus I reasoned to myself and my friends in pressing Mr. Sen Gupta's claim to the Mayoralty of Calcutta."

Both the Congress Party and the Congress Municipal Party understood Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji had no doubt that Jatindra Mohan would live up to Deshbandhu's standards when he said : "The reason why, in spite of my love of municipal life and my knowledge of its utmost importance, I have permitted myself to advise the dangerous combination of three functions in one person is because I conceive the present to be an extraordinary occasion which requires a drastic, nay, a dangerous step. . . God grant the necessary wisdom and the power to Mr. Sen Gupta."

## CHAPTER XIV

### MAYOR OF CALCUTTA

Jatindra Mohan was elected Mayor of Calcutta for five terms which proved that both the Congress and the Corporation and the municipalities could march hand in hand towards glorious achievements. One of the outstanding features of Jatindra Mohan's mayorship was his staunch faith in, and loyalty to, Deshbandhu's ideals. To these he adhered with a strength of mind which was characteristic of the man who was so lovingly called "Deshapriya" and so admiringly referred to as "The Lion of Bengal".

As the new Mayor, Jatindra Mohan had endeared himself to the people of Calcutta by his impartiality, generosity and patience. Even the Opposition members expressed praise for him when he was elected for the second time, while the European members of the Corporation were much attracted by his personality. He conducted the affairs of the Corporation without any political bias. The advancement of the civic interests of the city was his main concern as Mayor. At the end of his five years of mayoralty, Jatindra Mohan had raised the status and respect of the Corporation to such a high level that it became one of the outstanding civic bodies of India. He made the Calcutta Corporation a "vigorous unit in an autonomous scheme of municipal self-government."

When Jatindra Mohan took over as Mayor, there were few good primary schools for girls apart from the Christian Mission schools. The new Corporation was able to increase the number of girls' schools by 50 per cent. In fact, the Corporation had taken up for implementation the

scheme for primary education formulated by Deshbandhu when he became the first Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation.

Jatindra Mohan was a staunch believer in the need for communal unity and the just treatment of both Hindus and Muslims. Subhas Bose, as Chief Executive Officer, had laid down the policy that "the new Corporation had got to respond to the spirit of the times. The claims of the Mohammedans, Christians and depressed classes had to be favourably considered and the administration not to be made to suffer in making appointments from any particular class."

Considerable improvement had also been made in the medical and health services and many new schemes were under way. The question of pure and cheaper food was also taken up, especially the supply of pure milk. Water supply was improved, better sanitation established in *bustees* and a new policy inaugurated in these spheres.

Throughout the first period of his Mayorship, Jatindra Mohan had taken positive measures for communal peace and unity. After his election for the second time, serious communal riots broke out in the Burra Bazar area. This was due to the hotly disputed question of music before mosques. Bravely and unhesitatingly, Jatin went into the troubled areas to try and restore peace. The situation was fraught with danger. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi had recently been killed when he was on a similar peace mission in Kanpur. Though he was aware of the danger, yet Jatindra Mohan did not hesitate to form a peace corps to restore calm and foster love and brotherhood between the Hindus and Muslims. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Shamsundar Chakravarti, Kiran Shankar Roy, Satkaripati Ray and Dr. Pratap Chandra Guha Roy, President of the Bengal Legislative Council, toured the troubled areas with him,



During the riots, the municipal services were naturally affected and the streets were littered with garbage. How was this to be cleared? It was a direct challenge to the Mayor who, as usual, rose to the occasion. Young men showed tremendous public spirit and large numbers of them started cleaning the streets. Jatindra Mohan was much moved at this gesture of service and love for the people. He remarked: "I desire, on my behalf and on behalf of my colleagues in the Corporation, to express our sincere appreciation of the public spirit shown by hordes of young men and other respectable gentlemen in various parts of Districts I and II in readily coming forward to assist the Corporation staff in attending to the conservancy of the area. They swept streets and flushed drains with their own hands and materially helped in the disposal of accumulated refuse and I recognise that, but for their splendid co-operation, it would have been impossible for the Corporation to cope with the work in such a short time."

The riots, however, had their repercussions and slowly the unity which had hitherto bound the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal began to break down. When the time for elections to the Legislative Council came, the Muslims began to fight a separate battle and many left the Congress Party. The Government also seemed to encourage this as it suited them to have a system of divide and rule. Those who were now in the Congress, even though they were Muslims, were designated as Hindus and the Hindu-Muslim Pact of Deshbandhu C. R. Das, approved at the Kanpur Congress in December 1925 with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu as President, was now nullified in Bengal's internal politics. Fifteen Muslim members of the Corporation submitted their resignations, but Jatindra Mohan refused to accept them. His efforts for communal peace now created an animosity among the militant Hindus against him. But he continued

his efforts and succeeded in persuading twelve of the fifteen Muslim members who had tendered their resignations to withdraw them and continue as members of the Corporation.

## CHAPTER XV

### KRISHNAGAR AND DISUNITY

The annual conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress was held at Krishnagar on May 22, 1926. Before the inauguration, the President of the Conference, Mr. Birendra Nath Sasmal, had distributed his speech to the delegates. In this speech, he had stated that those who were revolutionary in spirit and did not believe in non-violence should not be members of the Congress as it was essentially a body of non-violent workers for freedom. This remark caused an uproar at the meeting. Mr. Sasmal was asked to delete these words. He, however, insisted that it was his personal view, and as Chairman of the Conference, he had every right to express it. He suggested that if some of the delegates objected to them, they could raise an objection or ask for a vote on the matter. The revolutionary element, however, would not agree to this procedure and threatened to break up the Conference if the Chairman included these words in his speech. Jatindra Mohan tried to bring about a compromise and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, then President of the Indian National Congress, also intervened. Finally, Mr. Sasmal agreed to delete the paragraph about revolutionaries. When he rose to deliver his speech, he remarked that though the part objected to was his personal belief, he was asked to delete it. As soon as he uttered these words, there was a great commotion in the meeting and Mr. Sasmal was asked to apologise. He then stated that as the members seemed to have no confidence in him as Chairman, he would resign. He left the Chair and sat down with the members. Jatindra Mohan requested

the Chairman to finish his speech and said that if some members did not agree they could vote against it. Jatindra Mohan had to sit down as there was a great deal of shouting and disorder. Sarojini Naidu rose to try and quell the disturbance. She cried : "I am a child of Bengal and I have a right to be heard. Sasmal has deleted the paragraph to which most of us objected. That is an implied apology. Those who want democracy, those who fight for democracy, for liberty, for liberty of speech, should be prepared to allow others that liberty. In the name of liberty, you should not be undemocratic, uncharitable and unchivalrous. Shall I request your President in your name to come back and carry on the business?" Then she walked up to Mr. Sasmal and he agreed to resume his speech. Everyone thought that the matter had happily ended.

The next day, however, Mr. Upendranath Banerjee proposed that the meeting objected to the statement. Jatindra Mohan then proposed an amendment saying that this meeting did not agree with Mr. Sasmal and the amendment was accepted. Mr. Sasmal then left the conference. To remedy the situation, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee held a meeting at which the members could come to no decision due to the activities of the opposing group. Finally, the meeting had to be adjourned. In the meantime, the dissident group passed a motion of no-confidence against Mr. Sasmal and elected another Chairman, Mr. Chaudhuri. They also abjured the Hindu-Muslim Pact of 1925.

The Krishnagar Municipality had decided to give an address to Sarojini Naidu and Jatindra Mohan. The former accepted the address presented to her at a civic reception. Jatindra Mohan refused since he felt that he had not come to Krishnagar as Mayor of Calcutta and that the chief guest was Mr. Sasmal.

Soon after the Krishnagar incident, Jatindra Mohan called a special meeting of the B.P.C.C. on June 13, 1926. In a letter, he made it clear that in spite of the Hindu-Muslim trouble, the Hindu-Muslim Pact of 1925 had to be maintained and the B.P.C.C. could not reject it. Some members of the B.P.C.C. were anxious to destroy it. At this special meeting, it was also announced that the Krishnagar meeting with Mr. Chaudhuri in the Chair was null and void. This meeting was actually a turning point in Jatindra Mohan's life. There were three groups present. One was pro-Sengupta, and one anti-Sengupta. The third, led by Lalit Mohan Das, was neutral. The meeting was charged with emotion. A resolution was moved by Kiran Shankar Roy that as Mr. Chaudhuri was not a delegate, he had no right to conduct the meeting. This resolution was passed. It was also decided that the Hindu-Muslim Pact should be reiterated. Another resolution dissolved the existing Working Committee of the B.P.C.C. and empowered Jatindra Mohan to form a new Committee. Nirmal Chandra Chanda and Sarat Chandra Bose left the meeting and a new Committee was formed. Thirty members came from the District Congress Committee and the President was authorised to nominate another thirty.

Mr. P. K. Chakravarti, Editor of the *Forward*, wrote an editorial entitled "Contraband Carriers" discussing the proceedings of the meeting, but it was alleged that, at about eleven at night, the editorial was held back by Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose. On the following day, at a meeting of the Board of Directors, Mr. P. K. Chakravarti was removed from the editorship because it was rumoured that he favoured Jatindra Mohan. His editorial was later published in the English edition of *Basumati*, but not in the *Forward*, which had now changed its policy. As a result of the split five members—Tulsi Charan Goswami, Nirmal Chandra

Chanda, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Sarat Chandra Bose and Suresh Chandra Das—resigned from the newly formed Committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. A Manifesto was published under the signatures of five prominent members of the Congress—Goswami, Dr. B. C. Roy, Nirmal Chandra Chanda, N. R. Sarkar and Sarat Bose—who later came to be known as the “Big Five” of Bengal. In this manifesto, Jatindra Mohan was attacked for his policies. Jatindra Mohan then published a rejoinder refusing all the accusations. The rift thus became wider and more marked. The two statements actually showed that there was no difference in the ideals of the two groups. However, the disunity in the party caused faults to be found when there need have been none. It was an unfortunate phase of Congress politics in Bengal which led to many splits and compromises. It caused great confusion among the people of Bengal.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, commenting on the Krishnagar Conference, said that there was a revolt in Bengal at the Krishnagar Conference. Though J. M. Sengupta won a sort of victory, the rumblings of revolt continued. “There were secessions from the ranks of the B.P.C.C. of men like Babu Amarendra Nath Chatterjee and Nirmal Chandra Chanda. The issue centred round the Pact that was being observed in Bengal for some time between the Hindus and the Muslims. Sen Gupta’s triple demand was : (1) observe the Pact, (2) ignore the Krishnagar Conference, and (3) do not accept office. The split between the two wings became a wide chasm. Sengupta was charged with being given to cavalier methods, with neglecting village reconstruction and indifference to the fund collected for the purpose, with his rupture with the very men who had raised him aloft, and with taking powers to nominate 30 members to the Executive in addition to 30 elected ones. The

Karmis took up the revolt under the leadership of Babu Nirmal Chandra Chanda and Sarat Chandra Bose.”\* This split continued till the end of Jatindra Mohan’s life, and added greatly to the tragedy of his remaining short, sad years. It may be said that never once, in all the troubles he had to overcome, did he sell his conscience or compromise between right and wrong. To him the ‘straight and narrow road’ was the only path to follow and this he sometimes had to travel alone. He steered his life through the many troubles which beset him and finally, he emerged as one of the most honest of men and a devout patriot.

\**History of the Indian National Congress* by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, p. 2

## CHAPTER XVI

### COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND MAYOR AGAIN

In the autumn of 1926, elections to the Legislative Councils started throughout India. Jatindra Mohan had a busy time conducting the various election campaigns, which entailed travelling to all parts of India. In Bihar, Dr. Rajendra Prasad wanted a message from the dynamic Bengali leader. In Madras, Mr. Prakasam and others demanded his services and the *Hindu* published his messages for the election campaign. In Bengal itself, despite the disunity in the Congress, Jatindra Mohan was elected with a big majority.

At this time, Jatindra Mohan protested against the British attitude towards Indians. At the annual meeting of the Bengal European Association in December 1926, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and the Governor were also present. The Association's President, Mr. Langford James, in his speech, seemed to have indicated that it was not desirable to co-operate with Indians. Jatindra Mohan, in a statement published by the Associated Press, said: "The people of India do not differentiate and in my opinion, quite rightly, between official and non-official Europeans in India. Lord Lytton pleaded only the other night for mutual trust between the people of India and England, but a flat 'no' has been given by the President of the European Association in the presence of, and without any protest from, their Excellencies the Governor of Bengal and the Viceroy of India." Jatindra Mohan went on to say that it was no wonder "all this talk of co-operation was a huge farce". Mr. Langford James' speech could have been ignored had it not been for the fact that he was the President of Euro-



pean Association of Bengal. As a leader of a political party and Mayor of Calcutta, Jatindra Mohan felt it his duty to issue a warning that if such an attitude continued, the 'challenge of the European community would be taken up by Indians. He said: "The Congress is pledged to non-violence and its members are sincerely anxious that the struggle for Swaraj should be carried on on non-violent lines. It pains me to think that our efforts should be frustrated by gentlemen of the like of Mr. Langford James."

It has been said that there existed a rivalry between Subhas Chandra Bose and Jatindra Mohan. This was perhaps exaggerated, for there was genuine love between the two. During the imprisonment of Jatindra Mohan and Subhas Bose in the same prison in Alipore Jail, there was some trouble with the warders. In the fracas, both Jatindra Mohan and Subhas Bose were injured and the latter fainted. Jatindra Mohan was most concerned about his young compatriot. Later, Jatindra Mohan declared that he was always prepared to discuss and overcome any differences of opinion between Mr. Bose and himself. The sad part was that outside influences created differences between the leaders which need never have existed.

When Subhas Bose was ill in prison, Jatindra Mohan, in a speech, had remarked :

We, as representatives of the citizens of Calcutta, ought to have one feeling with regard to the condition of our Chief Executive Officer, Subhas Chandra Bose. This feeling is a feeling of anxiety. In all conscience, the latest report about him is causing great anxiety, not only among the Councillors and officers of the Corporation, but also in every Bengalee heart. A dull, low fever, with night sweats and pains in the spine are very serious symptoms. In the face of these symp-

toms, who will deny that Mr. S. C. Bose is wasting away in his lonely cell in Mandalay Jail? It is a solemn occasion and our hearts are too dull to refer to any controversial matters on this occasion. I will not talk of any controversial ground on which the detention of Subhas Chandra Bose is wrong. It is our duty today, it is an imperative call on us, to try and get his release at once.

According to the latest pronouncement of His Excellency the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, the Empire of India needs residuary powers to spirit away young men and public workers without any trial for the purpose of keeping the Government carrying on the administration of the country. But, may I tell that power of the Government that they should not beguile themselves with that argument.

Subhas Chandra Bose is ill. He has lost weight in an appalling way and is physically incapable of doing any active work for years to come. Is it to be said that although he is getting fever every day, has pains all over his body, has night sweats and is losing weight in an alarming way, that even today, if he is released, he will go in for revolutionary activities? It was only the other day that Lord Irwin advised the people of this country to stick to the Hindu faith of kinhood. The Hindus do believe the King to be the incarnation of Vishnu, the Protector and Preserver of the universe. We do not grudge His Excellency the satisfaction of being the inheritor of that glorious tradition, but it ill becomes that inheritor to constantly remind the people of this helpless land of the eternal antagonism between the State and the individual as he did on Monday last in the Legislative Assembly.

Let Lord Irwin ponder over this appeal that is

going to him from this Corporation and let all Englishmen ponder over this appeal of mine. I appeal to humanity outside and inside India to ponder whether you, who arrogate to yourselves the powers of Vishnu, the Protector and Preserver, on the plea of the safety of the State, want to endanger the life of an individual, too ill for any activity. Let Subhas Chandra Bose be released today.

I take my stand at the Bar of humanity. We the people of India have no power today either to coerce or settle or coax you. In the plenitude of your power, listen for a moment to the still small voice within you—release Subhas Chandra Bose. The mute pangs of the whole of the people are throbbing out, 'Release him'. The power that guides the State and prompts the individual, dictates—'Release him', 'Release Subhas Chandra Bose'.

I met Subhas Bose several years later, in 1938, long after the death of Jatindra Mohan. This great leader had come to tea at Nellie Sengupta's house. I can never forget the startling personality of Subhas Bose, his immaculate clothes and the gracious and friendly manner in which he spoke to us. I never saw him after this meeting, but he left a lasting impression on my mind.

Jatindra Mohan was proposed as Mayor for the third time in April 1927. In the contest, he won by 45 votes to 39. There was great excitement at the result and a demand was made for a recounting of the votes. On the second count, the voting was 46 to 39 as the Chairman himself had forgotten to cast his vote the first time. His rival, Jatindra Nath Bose, was the first to congratulate Jatindra Mohan on his victory.

Jatindra Mohan then made his address as Mayor, tabulating the functions of this office :

There is a subject of controversy that has been introduced by my friend Rai Bahadur Ram Taran Banerjee. He has asked me, he has asked you, whether or not it would be wise for us to suggest to the Bengal Legislative Council that some measure should be taken, some Act should be passed, or our Act should be so modified that there is no interference by the Corporation with the Executives of this body. It has been said over and over again that the Mayor is merely like the Speaker of the House of Commons or the President of a legislative body. I deny that statement. He is no doubt like the Speaker of the House of Commons or the President of a legislative body, but his duties are more than those of the Speaker of the House of Commons. He not only decides and gives rulings, but he does many other things. One of the things he does is to help in the initiation of policies not only in big matters but also in very small matters in the Corporation. There is another function which he has to perform, and it is that, as the head of the Corporation, it is his duty to keep harmony between the Corporation and the Executive, which has to carry out the orders of the Corporation.

Jatindra Mohan went on to say that "the Act has been so framed that it pre-supposes an Executive who will loyally carry out its duties under the orders of the Calcutta Corporation"; as long as this loyalty was there, there would be no interference and only if there was no loyalty was there any question of interference.

Two years after the death of Deshbandhu, arrangements were made for a memorial to be raised at the place of his cremation. This work was undertaken by the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee at first, but, afterwards, it became an All-Party Memorial. Jatindra Mohan was asked to

lay the foundation stone. Though there was so much enthusiasm at the time and such strong feelings in favour of the Memorial, yet it was seven year later, after the death of Jatindra Mohan himself, that the Memorial was completed.

At this time, the kidnapping of girls and women in Bengal became a rampant crime and a public menace. The Hindu society disallowed a fallen woman to return to its fold and ostracised all those who had been kidnapped, even though they were rescued or somehow managed to escape. They were thus forced to become prostitutes. This became a serious social evil and Lord Lytton drew the attention of the people to the problem. He found that public interest was lacking. So, he invited Jatindra Mohan (in 1926) to help him to create public interest on the project. Jatindra Mohan agreed at once and started the Mayor's Fund for minor girls. On the establishment of the Fund, Lord Lytton wrote to him:

Dear Mr. Sen Gupta,

I must thank you for having responded so promptly to my appeal by opening a fund for the relief of the minor girls, whose unfortunate lot I ventured to bring to your notice. I think it would help to ensure the success of your Fund if you were to announce the names of subscribers in the daily press, with the amount of their subscriptions, when received.

When the Fund is complete, it would be wise to entrust it to the Vigilance Association, an existing organisation, which has already shouldered, with much courage and energy, the responsibility for dealing with this great evil.

With a renewed expression of my thanks to yourself.

Believe me,  
Yours sincerely,  
Sd/- (Lytton).

Mr. Greaves, a High Court Judge, had started a home for rescued girls. A zamindar gave his garden and money to the Fund and many homes were founded. At a meeting on July 11, 1927, in the town Hall, Jatindra Mohan drew the attention of the Governor, Stanley Jackson, to the Fund. At the meeting, Jatindra Mohan proposed him to the Chair and said : "It may be a matter of surprise to many and to some of my friends whom I see around me that I should be present here to welcome and propose His Excellency to the Chair." The occasion was such that no prejudices of caste, colour, creed, community or politics mattered. Funds had to be provided for the rescue of minor girls "from a life of shame and utter degradation". Lord Lytton had had many bitter controversies with Jatindra Mohan's political party, but when he took up the initiative in this noble work, Jatindra Mohan had not hesitated to respond immediately. He expressed the hope that Sir Stanley would "in this great humanitarian, in this more than national, in this supra-national work guide us and help us to successfully fight against this iniquitous system which is a standing shame to Calcutta." The Sheriff seconded Jatindra Mohan's proposal and Sir Stanley Jackson was duly elected President.

In his reply, the Governor said that the object of the meeting provided a common platform for all. He pointed out that the evil which they were going to fight was serious and of large proportions in Calcutta; there were many girls and children "helplessly and hopelessly enchained in vice." Though the police rescued girls, there was no provision for them to lead a respectable life. Voluntary effort was required for this. There was only one home for girls and one for children. Sir Stanley stressed the need for funds so that many such homes may be provided. Referring to Lord Lytton's appeal and subsequent disappointment with the response, he recalled that just before he left India,

he had referred the matter to the Mayor. Sir Stanley then added : "You, Mr. Mayor immediately responded and issued an appeal. Today, you have most kindly come here and by getting the support of your high position and your great personal influence, I feel sure, the appeal will meet with better results. . . . . The funds will be well administered and the Homes will be well looked after by thoroughly competent committees."

The Mayor then moved a resolution for the establishment of rescue homes and the creation of a Fund. He called upon everyone to contribute to it and arouse public interest in the good cause. Jatindra Mohan turned to the Governor and said that the punishment to perpetrators of this crime should be merciless. He pointed out to Sir Stanley that severe measures were taken against political prisoners but that these villains who kidnapped and ruined innocent girls escaped with light sentences. The miscreants, Jatindra Mohan felt, should be publicly whipped, and if he could have his way he would do so. The Governor promised his co-operation and help in this humane and noble work.





## PART II

### THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

“May we see good in what we have achieved, in what we have accomplished, even where we have failed and been thwarted. May the victory and the defeat of our past struggles, fatigue and despair nerve us with greater courage and enthuse us with new hopes and lead us on the path of freedom. The mountain of difficulty melts before him, in whose heart the fire of freedom burns constantly. And at the end of this journey, there will spring upon earth, peace and love and a blissful paradise, while in the wake of tears in the eyes of the people will shine forth radiant smiles of delight. And limbs that for ages have been benumbed by the weight of shackles will vibrate with the flow of life. The blissful day is not a dream. The sun of freedom has already cast its glow on the eastern horizon”.

*(Extract from a speech delivered at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Basirhat in 1928, by Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sengupta)*



## CHAPTER I

### THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

From 1926 onwards, the freedom struggle gathered momentum. The scene in Bengal was active but aggressive, and at the helm of affairs stood the figure, majestic and outstanding, of Jatindra Mohan. The question of detention of political prisoners was taken up by the Corporation. Mr. M. A. Razzak moved a resolution in the Calcutta Corporation protesting against the action of the Government in continuing to detain some of the citizens of Calcutta who were arrested under Regulation III of 1818 and the Bengal Ordinance of 1924 without any charge or trial. When the discussion was opened, Jatindra Mohan stated that no witnesses or records had been called for in connection with the Regulation III cases, but that merely the statements of the police had been taken in the absence of the accused. It was not fair that the prisoners should be confined without a trial. It was "a travesty of all fairness in any country or in any civilisation".

Great resentment was felt at the time against the Government on the system of Dyarchy and the use of special powers to neutralise the Swaraj Party's many victories in the Legislative Council.

In 1926, when the question of election to the Councils was taken up, the Muslims had been won over by the Government and even some Hindus had veered towards the rulers. Speaking in the Council on dyarchy, Jatindra Mohan said :

The Government asks us to revive Dyarchy which we killed three years ago and I say, we may win or lose

today on this motion. Whatever the result may be, when the division is called, I can assure you, Sir, and the members of this House and the people outside this Council Chamber that you may have some Ministers but you should remember that the spirit of resistance and the spirit of organisation, which have come into existence by the efforts of that great leader Deshbandhu Das, would not be killed and though Dyarchy may stand up in frame, in reality there would be nothing inside Dyarchy even if we see two Ministers actually appointed and drawing fat salaries.

Sir, I was going to point out the real motive, the real purpose, behind this resolution. In 1921, the Congress declared that there was nothing in the present constitution, that the Ministers were mere puppets and the result was that all Congressmen stayed outside the Councils, not for the purpose of working the constitution, but for the purpose of stopping the mischief which our countrymen, who were in love with the constitution, were doing to the cause of freedom in this country. Their object is to kill ruthlessly that spirit of organisation and resistance which Deshbandhu Das inculcated into the heart of the people. The object of this motion is to kill that spirit of organisation and resistance inside the Legislature of which the Government of Bengal, the bureaucracy and even the Government of England are afraid.

For two years, no Ministers had been appointed and the Government temporarily suspended Dyarchy as it realised that so long as the Swaraj Party was strong, there would be no stable Ministry. From 1924 to 1926, the Government tolerated defeats in the Council by the Swaraj Party and exercised its special powers to oppose the attacks made by the Swarajists. The Party was weakened during

the communal riots of 1926 due to Hindu-Muslim disunity. In November 1926, after the third election for the Bengal Legislative Council, it became clear that there were sharp Hindu-Muslim differences. The Government took this opportunity to introduce Dyarchy and to form Ministries. Jatindra Mohan made his speech on the proposal of the Government for Dyarchy. Mr. Travers, the leader of the European community in Bengal, had described the Bengal revolutionaries as murderers. The appointment of Ministers was now announced by the Government and a majority vote passed the salaries of these Ministers. However, the Ministry did not last long as in 1927 the Hindu-Muslim disunity began to ease. Gradually, a few of the Muslim members of the Council joined the Swaraj Party and the existing Ministry was defeated. New Ministries were installed, but they lasted only a little longer. Finally, in February 1929, Jatindra Mohan built up his Party's strength and defeated the Ministry, placing dyarchy once again in peril.

The Government then prepared a new plan, that of appointing three Ministers. So far, there had been one Muslim Minister and one Hindu Minister. The Government now decided to appoint three Ministers in future, two being Muslims and one Hindu, so that the Muslims would be in the majority and would win. This trick proved successful, but the Congress gave a directive that all Swaraj Party members should resign and that they should not enter the Councils under the system of Dyarchy.

The Simon Commission was appointed in November 1927, but the Congress did not accept it because of its previous disappointing experiences. A boycott was called, and the Simon Commission received no Congress support whatever. It was an all-White commission. The Moderates and Extremists, Hindus and Muslims and all others now united in criticising and protesting against the fact that

there were no Indians in the Commission. A boycott was organised throughout the country. Both the British Government and the British Cabinet were unprepared for such strong opposition. They had hoped that they would be pleasing the Moderates by appointing the Commission and they never realized that they would make this group lose their traditional patience. The Moderates now joined the Extremists.

At the Basirhat Conference on April 7, 1928, Jatindra Mohan spoke on the Hindu-Muslim problem. He said :

Though I do not attach any undue importance to the question (i.e. Hindu-Muslim riots) from the standpoint of politics and though I sincerely believe that, in this national crisis, it is now a thing of the past, yet I must say it has provided the Government with a very handy excuse and opportunity. It must not be forgotten that it was on account of the Hindu-Muslim differences that the Britishers got into India and secured control over her. Again, on account of this difference, they are now tightening their grip. With that end in view, they have sent the Simon Commission before its time.

India did not ask for this Commission. But the British Government has sent it with such hurry, with the object that, taking advantage of the communal differences, the Commission in the name of conciliation may tighten the fetters round India's feet.

But India has seen through the game and that is why we hear, all over the land, the persistent cry asking the Commission to go back. The Indian National Congress, the Trade Union Congress, the Khilafat Conference, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Liberal Federation and all the other organisations have decided to boycott the Commission.

And this is perfectly justified. Why should we allow a third party to stand between us and our motherland? Why should we tolerate their impudent demand to examine our fitness? As for evidence, enough was placed before the Muddiman Committee. No, this gratuitous insult must be avenged.

Brothers and sisters, we should no longer allow this playing with our birth-right. Let these impudent people understand that you ignore them. Let the demand of political parties for the boycott of the Commission reverberate throughout the length and breadth of the land. Every one must understand that co-operation with this Commission will bring about irreparable mischief, but a complete boycott will be a distinct gain.

If any one, out of consideration for self-interest, co-operates with this Commission, he will thereby be injuring the interest of all the future generations. I would particularly bring this to the notice of my Muslim brethren. I would request them to remember that if in this crisis in the life of the nation, they overlook the greater issue, out of consideration for personal or sectional or of any smaller interest, that would result in bringing about the ruin of the whole country, of both Hindus and Musalmans. It should be borne in mind that this Commission wants us to agree to it, that the time and manner of each advance can be determined only by Parliament upon which responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian people.

We can never submit to this suicidal agreement. What we insist on is a Round Table Conference and not a Commission. If a Round Table Conference was possible in 1921 and 1924, why should it be impossi-

ble now? The Commission can give us nothing and we can have nothing to ask it.

Jatindra Mohan then went on to expose the real nature of the Commission. He pointed out that Sir John Simon had said that the Irish Constitution Bill of 1922 had been drafted in Ireland by Irishmen of Ireland. It was then sent to the Imperial Parliament for ratification. But, in India, Sir John was singing a different tune. He was no longer liberal in India because it was not a unanimous demand as in Ireland and the leaders in India were not as strong as Collins, *i.e.*, India could not take up the sword like Ireland. But India was going to follow Ireland. "We must frame our constitution and insist that India must be governed according to that constitution and if our demand is not complied with and what was apprehended in the case of Ireland really appears in India, we must not be held responsible for it. The Simon Commission came, toured and went back, being satisfied only with got-up receptions and dinners".

It was strongly felt in India that if there had been even two Indians on the Commission, there would not have been a boycott and the whole of India would not have opposed the Commission during its second visit. The strangest part was that in spite of this complete boycott, Sir John proceeded with his evidence month after month. For all the Commission did, the members may have indeed sat in their own country instead of coming out to India. The voice that they heard was not really the voice of India.



## CHAPTER II

### POPULAR MAYOR

The election of Jatindra Mohan as Mayor of Calcutta for the fourth time took place on April 2, 1928. Jatindra Mohan had been Mayor for three years and, during this period, he had established the prestige and power of the Corporation. If he had been a candidate for the fourth time in succession, he could easily have been elected. A few months earlier, Subhas Bose had been released after four years of imprisonment. At the end of 1927, Subhas was President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. At the time of the Mayoral election, many people were eager to elect him as Mayor. Jatindra Mohan agreed and did everything in his power to have Subhas Bose elected. The Councillors opposed to the Congress Party set up Bijoy Kumar Basu as their candidate. At that time, the Congress alone did not command enough votes to ensure the election of their candidate. Just before the meeting, Mr. Phelps and Mr. C. C. Biswas, two Councillors, sent round a slip to Jatindra Mohan asking him to stand for election at the last moment. Jatindra Mohan, however, persisted in proposing Subhas Bose. Unfortunately, the latter lost to Basu by a few votes and the Corporation went out of Congress hands. B. K. Basu, however, followed Jatindra Mohan's Congress policy in the Corporation.

When it was time for the Mayoral election next year (1929), it was felt that the Congress must regain the Mayoralship. The Muslims of the Corporation asked Jatindra Mohan to stand for election again and the Congress also chose him. Sarat Bose was the Chairman of the meeting

and he asked for names to be proposed. Jatindra Mohan's name was proposed by Subhas Bose and seconded by a Muslim Councillor. Jatindra Mohan was elected Mayor without any opposition. Huge crowds outside cheered as Jatin was escorted to the Mayoral chair. Sarat Bose garlanded him and flower petals were showered on him. Overwhelmed by the warm support he received, Jatindra Mohan said :

"I am genuinely touched by your congratulations and all that you have said about me.

"I take it that this uncontested election means, first that you have confidence in me and secondly, that you have confidence in the programme set before us, in this Corporation, by our late leader, the first Mayor of this city, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das."

Jatindra Mohan again sponsored the programme and policy of Deshbandhu. He said that the Corporation would not be anti-European and sought the co-operation of all by saying : "You cannot have two parties on one programme. I, therefore, venture to invite you all, each one of you, to give me all the support that is in your power so that we may work out Deshbandhu's programme. Educating the masses, feeding the hungry, bringing comfort to the afflicted—what nobler programme for a city can you advise... But let me remind you that the country is greater than any person and to me, the Indian National Congress is greater than all, and as such, we always work for the real welfare of the citizens of this great city."

The next year, on April 29, 1930, Jatindra Mohan was again elected Mayor for the fifth time, though he was in jail for having taken part in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Jatindra Mohan was respected far and wide. He had been elected five times as Mayor of India's largest city. The

respect in which he was held can be judged by the following reference made to him by Mr. Maurice Collis, the Judge who wrote so extensively about the trial Jatindra Mohan had to face later in a court in Burma. Mr. Maurice Collis had remarked. "The trial was bound to be very sensational. It was unusual for one provincial government to arrest a prominent public-man residing under another provincial government of the charge of sedition committed within the area of the first. The excitement in Bengal would be intense, for Sen Gupta was probably among the five best-known men in India at the time. Educated at Cambridge and called to the Bar, he had made a lucrative practice for himself in Calcutta. After the war, he had gone into politics and on the death of the great nationalist, C.R. Das, had become the leader of the Congress Party in his Province. His followers called him the "Lion of Bengal". His wife was an Englishwoman."

Not only was Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan honoured in his own Province, but his following in other parts of India was almost as large as in Bengal. He was presented with a welcome addressed by the Kanpur Municipality when he attended the Congress session there and also by the Madras Congress which invited him to preside over its deliberations, but, unfortunately, due to pressure of work in India, he had to decline this honour. He was asked to attend the 10th Anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet Republic in Russia, which again he had to refuse. Jatindra Mohan had earned for himself national as well as international fame. It was unfortunate that due to heavy pressure of work in Bengal and his own poor and fast-deteriorating health, he was able to contribute to political activities only in Bengal.

## CHAPTER III

### CONGRESS CALL FOR FREEDOM

The boycott of the Simon Commission has been referred to earlier. The decision to ignore the Commission was taken at the All-India Congress Session at Madras in 1927, presided over by Dr. M. A. Ansari. This Congress Session has become historic for its adoption of the resolution demanding full independence. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had proposed this resolution which was unanimously accepted. It was in this session that the problem of Hindu-Muslim disunity was tackled and solved to a considerable extent. Jatindra Mohan played an important role in these efforts for inter-communal amity.

When the Simon Commission had finished its first visit and returned to England, Indian nationalist leaders got busy striving to strengthen the unity of the country. The Commission was to return that year for another tour. The leaders asked the people to boycott it, at the same time ensuring that no communal riots resulted from it. The Congress had given a call for supporting joint electorates. Jatindra Mohan spoke on this subject and pointed out that separate electorates could only be accepted by the communities if they thought in terms of narrow self-interest. Hindus, on the whole, never wanted separate electorates and if some Muslims did, it was only because they were thinking only of their own individual interests or of their own community. The majority of the Muslim community would have chosen joint electorates if left to think for themselves and if they had not been made a target of political propaganda. In his speech at the

Session, Jatindra Mohan remarked that both communities would "in the course of time forget to vote on communal lines and only return the best candidates, Hindu or Mohamadan, who would look after their interests." Throughout his political career, Jatindra Mohan remained one of the greatest advocates of communal peace.

Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan was elected President of the Session of the Bengal Provincial Congress held in April 1928 at Basirhat. The communal disunity in Bengal had considerably decreased, though, later, the opposition groups gained a little power again. Jatindra Mohan was against all the dissensions which had appeared, but he was at times blamed for them. Characteristically, he never retaliated and always did good "to those who spitefully used him". He was imbued with the spirit of generosity which was never tainted with spite or envy or ill-feeling towards anyone. At Basirhat, Jatindra Mohan's Presidential speech was remarkable for its frank assessment of the freedom struggle, its sincerity and its spirit of self-sacrifice. He felt that though India was faced with many big problems, they could be solved. He said : "We hail back Subhas Chandra to his place in our hearts. Our hope and enthusiasm has been redoubled by having the noblest son of Bengal in our midst. This time we will surely succeed in the great venture." The British policy, the need for a Round Table Conference, Hindu-Muslim unity, the Simon Commission, the Indian Constitution, separate electorates, boycott and the student movement made up the subject-matter of his speech. He called upon every son and daughter of India to work for freedom and peace in the entire world.

A great event for Bengal was the coming (1928) session of the All-India Congress to be held in Calcutta that year. Pandit Motilal Nehru was requested to be the

President, but due to his moderate attitude towards the issue of complete Independence as demanded by the Congress at Madras, Motilal expressed his hesitation to accept. Jatindra Mohan, therefore, wrote on this subject to Pandit Motilal Nehru. The letter dated July 27, 1928, read as follows :—

My dear Panditji,

Yesterday, I received a telegram from Mahatmaji telling me that you were disinclined to accept the Presidentship of the next Congress. The news came to me like a shock. I immediately consulted my friends and we were unanimous in sending a reply by wire telling Mahatmaji in strong terms to press you to get over your disinclination.

This is not the time for us to be shy or hesitant. We *must* have you. You must come and lead us in this political crisis at home and abroad. The majority of the provinces have sent us intimation that they want you. Four or five of them have sent in only one name, namely yours, although being the first selection, they could have added other names.

Bengal is unanimous about you, because we cannot do without you. I can well understand the feelings of a father when his son is also in the field. But most of them are in the position of your sons. You will, therefore, pardon us for pressing you so much. You must not disappoint us, whatever reason you may have for your disinclination. How much more strongly can I put our case before you?

I have written a long letter to Mahatmaji today. I am sending you a copy. Do kindly drop me a line to say all is well.

*Yours sincerely,*

J. M. SEN GUPTA\*

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\*A Bunch of Old Letters, Asia Publishing House, p. 59.

Subhas Bose also wrote to Motilal Nehru and, in the end, he agreed to accept the invitation from the leaders of Bengal.

The All India Congress Session was held in Calcutta in December 1928. The leading men of the party in Bengal took up the various responsibilities. This organised manner of conducting affairs set an example for what can be achieved by united effort. At this time, Lala Lajpat Rai, the 'Lion of the Punjab', died. He had been hurt while leading a procession and had finally succumbed. There had been talk in Calcutta of not having a very grand session and Motilal Nehru also asked Jatindra Mohan to do without the fanfare. Jatindra Mohan and his colleagues explained to Motilal Nehru that he must be properly honoured as the President. The session turned out to be one of the best-organised Congress sessions. A large industrial fair was arranged. The discussions included Jawaharlal Nehru's report of 1927 and the resolution on Dominion Status, steered by Mahatma Gandhi and Jatindra Mohan.

The Session proved to be one of the most memorable, especially as it was held in a turbulent phase of the freedom struggle.

Jatindra Mohan drove "in state" with Pandit Motilal Nehru, the President-elect. In his speech on December 29, as Chairman of the Reception Committee, Jatindra Mohan covered the various aspects of freedom in broad and comprehensive terms. He pointed out that it was the ninth time that the Indian National Congress was holding its session in Calcutta, though it had not met in the great city since the "memorable Special Session of September 1920 when it accepted the programme of non-cooperation placed before the country by that great and good man, M. K. Gandhi". Extending a warm and hearty welcome to the delegates, he remarked that the Congress had grown in power since 1926

and was now recognised by all as the representative organisation of the masses.

Referring to events in the previous years, Jatin pointed out that India had lost many great patriots. Hakim Ajmal Khan—that staunch peace-maker between Hindus and Muslims—had passed away. There were others who were no more, and while preparations were being made for the 1928 Session itself, Lala Lajpat Rai was snatched away. “Lajpat Rai’s whole career was one long series of labours and sacrifices for the depressed classes.” said Jatin. “Indians are convinced that even if the assault was not the only cause of his death, it did hasten it. Perhaps, Providence in His inscrutable way wanted to remind us, through this humiliation of our leader, of the humiliating position of the whole nation and of our utter helplessness and thus to inspire us to sink all our differences and put forth our best efforts for the purpose of destroying once and for all a state of things which makes it possible for a foreign government and their agents to insult, imprison, assault, to deport without trial, the greatest, the noblest and the most illustrious of our men.”

Jatindra Mohan was convinced that the only way to defend national honour was through united action to be focussed on a single rallying point. This unity was evident in the Nehru Report of the previous year which was being considered by the Congress. “I look upon this document not as a begging bowl for Dominion Status, but as a weapon in our fight for full independence”, said Jatin. Stressing that the report provided the rallying point for the various political forces in the country, he said : “The strength of a draft Constitution is to be measured primarily, I think, by the amount of support it is able to marshal behind itself. Judged from this point of view, there is no proposal before the country which can challenge comparison with the



Nehru Report.” He pleaded for the acceptance of the report.

Both Sir Stanley Jackson and the Viceroy had put forward Dominion Status ‘as a reward for co-operation’. Doubtful that Britain would fulfil this promise, Jatin observed : “Friends, if England was sincere, if co-operation was really meant to be rewarded with Dominion Status, India has already earned it. There can be no question of its gradual realisation. The policy of co-operation has been overdone. No honest man can ever conceive of a greater degree of co-operation than what India has accorded to Britain.”

The first condition, Jatin felt, for a nation to be free was self-assertion as a whole through united action and unity of purpose. For this, it was essential that Indians mobilised their forces, closed their ranks, and stood on their own legs. Jatin called for a thorough self-examination to find out why great national movements in India, made by great men, had failed, while success had crowned similar movements in Turkey, Persia and China. He asked as to why the non-co-operation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi had failed, causing him to retire to his Ashram at Sabarmati, and why was it that Aurobindo had become a recluse, Chittaranjan Das had died of a broken heart, while Kamal Pasha, Reza Khan and Chiang Kai Shek sat in state in the Councils of free nations. The answer, he said, was to be sought in India’s own national defects, like slavish worship of the past, communal dissensions, the caste and the purdah systems, polygamy, early marriage and such other cankers of the body-politic. Urging quick remedial measures, Jatin said :

The women must be free. You cannot with impunity paralyse half the nation and by its dead weight handicap the other half. Is it not national *harakri* to impair

the vitality of the race by screening half its number behind the purdah and accelerate the process by the horrible custom of immature parenthood? The thousand and one air-tight compartments of the social fabric should be knocked down without mercy. Caste must go. What purpose does it serve in the present day economy of India? The original purpose behind it does not now exist. It is not based on the division of labour. It serves no useful purpose and exists only to emphasise meaningless, nay, harmful social distinction—a fruitful source of hatred, jealousy and conflict, an enervating factor in national life, narrowing down the marriage circle and often resulting in the evils of near-blood marriage.

Lastly, what can we expect from a people with a polygamous habit? A people, so pleasure-seeking, so devoid of self-control cannot show that self-abnegation, which is so very necessary in a soldier of liberty.

Jatindra Mohan told his audience at the Session that the conservative instinct was so deep-rooted that the work of the previous generation had been lost; and the progress brought about by great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar was dying out again. Perhaps, it was wrong to emphasise national defects at this time, he said, but he felt that one should not fear a frank self-examination. In his view, exposition of their defects would not handicap them in bargaining with Britain. Jatin said: "Admission of weakness, in their view, would ruin India's case before her judges. And so the cancerous sores must be bandaged with white linen to get the passport to freedom. I have no such illusions as regards the intentions of the British nation. I believe our salvation lies along the path of our efforts and therefore have no hesitation in calling a spade a spade. . ."

Jatindra Mohan concluded his speech thus : "Let the sons and daughters of India gather under the national standard and, with equality and fraternity as their battle-cry, march forward unceasingly, tirelessly towards the free life of a free nation, undaunted by calamity, unmoved by the wrath and repression of the powers that be."

## CHAPTER IV

### DISUNITY

Soon after the Congress Session of 1928, held in Calcutta, dissension once again appeared in Bengal and the unity, which Jatindra Mohan strove so hard to build up, broke down. Mr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, commenting on the situation in his *History of the Congress*\*, says : "The internal differences in Bengal which had led to long-standing election disputes, became the cause of an exchange of hot words between Subhas Babu and Motilalji, and exhibited themselves markedly in the Congress Week at Lahore." The leadership of the Province was the bone of contention between J. M. Sengupta and Subhas Chandra Bose. The differences came to a head on the issue of Council entry about which there was sharp divergence of views."

The dispute this time was centred round the money spent on the Congress and the income from the exhibition. The newspaper *Liberty*—formerly the *Forward*—had been a staunch supporter of Jatindra Mohan. Now, it published attacks on him. He had no newspaper to support him at this time. This want was, however, fulfilled later when he started the *Advance* in December 1929 under the management of his youngest brother, Ranendra Mohan. A newspaper warfare then started and brought to light prominent differences.

In 1929, Ananta Singh and other young men who a year later, were to be involved in the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case were members of the Chittagong District Congress Committee. As the younger group expressed a

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\**Op. cit.* p. 360.

keen desire to serve the country, the elder leaders allowed them to do so. Jatindra Mohan was the President of the Chittagong Congress Committee and among the other senior men in the Committee were Mahim Chandra Das and Tripura Chaudhuri. The younger lot proposed that the District Conference of the Congress should be held in Chittagong with Subhas Bose as the President. Mahim Chandra Das and Tripura Chaudhuri were made the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, respectively, of the Reception Committee and they were persuaded by the younger group to invite Subhas Bose to be the President of the Chittagong District Conference. This caused a great deal of embarrassment to Jatindra Mohan who was the President of the Chittagong Congress Committee. He was not even consulted on the proposal to invite Subhas Bose to be the President of the District Conference. Jatindra Mohan could not believe that the invitation had been extended to Subhas Bose, though, if he had been consulted, he would no doubt have been very glad to have supported the idea. Jatindra Mohan felt very hurt and all his followers shared his feelings. He was then in Calcutta but he had come to Chittagong on some other business. Mahim Das and Tripura Chaudhuri told him that they had to bring in fresh blood and wanted younger men in the Congress. Jatindra Mohan explained to them that he would never have objected to inviting Subhas Bose, but the manner in which they had done it made him feel small.

During the preparatory stages of the Conference, there was a great deal of commotion in Chittagong. The organisers decided to hold three conferences at the same time, the District Conference, the Youth Conference and the Students' Conference in order, it was felt, to create a great show. When the District Conference started in the Jatra Mohan Hall, there was a motto put up on the gate saying

“Country First”. Far behind came the motto of “Right, Truth and Religion”. This caused some resentment and many objected to it. A large group of young men demanded the removal of this strange motto which gave “Truth” only a second place. The organisers of the Conference refused to co-operate and one group of youths left the meeting. Later, about 200 young men wanted to enter the meeting hall without entrance cards. A big clash ensued between the Conference volunteers and this group. A large number were injured in the exchange of stones and brickbats. Finally, the police intervened and the confusion subsided.

There was trouble again in the afternoon session over which Subhas Bose was presiding. A brick was hurled down into the meeting place, allegedly from a nearby house. The enraged volunteers entered this house and belaboured the householder. A criminal case was then brought by the householder against the volunteers, some of whom were later convicted.

There was hope of Bengal being united again when Jatindra Nath Das, the Joint Secretary of the South Calcutta Congress Committee, undertook a hunger strike in the Lahore jail to protest against the ill-treatment of political prisoners. After 63 days of starvation, Jatindra Nath Das died on September 13, 1929. There was strong popular resentment all over the country against the Government’s callous attitude. Das became a martyr, and tributes were paid to him by leaders everywhere in India. Jatindra Mohan, Subhas Bose, B. C. Roy, J. C. Gupta, Kiran Shankar Roy and others went to receive his body at the Howrah railway station.

Thousands of people joined the huge funeral procession as it moved to the cremation ground at Keoratala Ghat. This sacrifice yielded some results and some steps were

taken to improve the conditions for political prisoners. They were henceforth divided into classes A, B and C, and Judges were asked to indicate in the sentence the class in which a political prisoner was to be kept.

This episode helped to bring together the rival groups in Bengal. This, however, proved to be temporary as another dissension appeared in November 1929 at the Annual Meeting of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Subhas Bose was at this time the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, while Kiran Shankar Roy was the Secretary. The opposition group in Chittagong did not want Jatindra Mohan to be returned to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee from Chittagong. Jatindra Mohan did win a seat, though out of the seven delegates from Chittagong he was the only one from the old party. The others were all of the new group.

At the meeting, there was keen contest for the Presidency of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and Jatindra Mohan lost to Subhas Bose by four votes. A section of the audience started shouting that the counting of votes was not conducted properly and that the election was illegal. They demanded that Jatindra Mohan must continue as a member of the Working Committee. Jatindra Mohan tried to calm the excited people. The crowd continued shouting slogans, but Jatindra Mohan refused to have a re-election and said that he had no ill-feeling whatsoever. His house on Elgin Road was filled with his supporters and he could hardly move inside. Finally, Sudhir Roy, Desbandhu's son-in-law, intervened and Subhas Bose came to the Sengupta house where he was welcomed by Jatindra Mohan. Subhas remained with Jatindra Mohan for about two hours. The crowd was still dissatisfied and finally passed a resolution to appeal against the election.

The next day, the Congress Working Committee met at

Allahabad. Jatindra Mohan was a member of the Working Committee and he also went there to attend the meeting. Even before hearing the appeal by the supporters of Jatindra Mohan, the Working Committee had appointed Motilal Nehru to deal with the dispute in Bengal. Due to some objections, the dispute was finally referred to M. S. Aney.

Aney's report was delayed due to the Civil Disobedience Movement which started in 1930. His report was ready only in 1931. In 1932, the Civil Disobedience Movement gathered greater momentum. Nothing could be done about the report and it was more or less forgotten in Bengal.



## CHAPTER V

### FULL INDEPENDENCE

The resolution for demanding full Independence, as sponsored by the Nehru report, had been passed in 1927 at Madras. The Calcutta Congress, in 1928, had made the final choice between Dominion Status and full Independence. In the Lahore Session in 1929, not only was full Independence proclaimed as the goal, but positive action in that direction was also taken. The Congress gave its Working Committee full powers to take all steps to reach this goal. It proclaimed January 26 as the Independence Day throughout India. As a member of the Working Committee, Jatindra Mohan had to inaugurate the demonstrations in Bengal on January 26. At this time, he was sick with high blood pressure and had been advised by doctors to rest. His doctors had also suggested a holiday on the sea. He decided to go on a round trip to Singapore and back, but had to put it off until after January 26, 1930. In defiance of his doctor's orders, he went on January 25 to a meeting to pass a resolution regarding the hoisting of the national (Congress) flag on Corporation buildings. He had to be helped up the dais and spoke sitting in his chair. In this illuminating speech, he said: "As the Mayor of the city, I feel it is my duty above all others to attend to-day's meeting of the Corporation and express my views on the proposal which is about to be placed before you." He went on to say that the Union Jack was "an affront to our national honour when flown by us over our national institutions and is a cause of considerable panic in our minds. I mean no disrespect to the Britishers. I

mean no disrespect to the British flag. But I shall not be accused of any indifference to our feelings, if I say that I put my country's flag above every other flag." He expressed the hope that the resolution to hoist the flag would be passed unanimously. The resolution ran as follows :

"That the Corporation do hoist the National Flag on all Municipal buildings and institutions on Sunday, the 26th January, 1930, and on all ceremonial occasions in future and the Chief Executive Officer be requested to make the necessary arrangements for hoisting the National flag tomorrow."

The Resolution and the Mayor's speech was read out by the Deputy Mayor, as Jatindra Mohan himself was too ill to do so. The members were asked to accept the resolution and it was then put to vote. There were only seven votes against and the Corporation was now free to hoist the national flag and the next day, it flew on all Corporation buildings. Later, it was ruled by the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Mr. S. K. Sinha, that the hoisting of the national flag was fully legal, and not seditious.

Jatindra Mohan was asked to hoist the flag in Deshbandhu Park. He was very ill at the time, but nevertheless performed this happy task. Together with Nellie and his faithful henchman, Kshitish Chandra Ganguli, he was received with great fervour in Deshbandhu Park.

Jatindra Mohan again and again challenged the Government to prosecute him on various charges. He was fearless and most confident of the rightness of his patriotic mission. When Subhas Chandra Bose had been arrested in earlier years, Deshbandhu had said : "If patriotism is a crime, I am a criminal." Jatindra Mohan followed this same maxim. This was the spirit in which the gallant sons of India fought for their country's independence.

Soon after the hoisting of the national flag on January

26, 1930, Jatindra Mohan left for his projected voyage to Singapore. It was hoped that the sea voyage would give him peace and lower his blood pressure. But the voyage was anything but peaceful.

Accompanied by his wife, he left for Singapore on February 1, 1930. At Rangoon, on February 3, he was requested by some prominent people to speak. Since he wished to have undisturbed rest, he declined, promising to do so on his way back. Mr. Abdul Bari Choudhury, Managing Director of the Bengal-Burma Steam Navigation Company, called on him on board and urged Jatindra Mohan to come ashore on the way back. Mr. Choudhury wanted him to put in a word against separation of Burma from India. This was of utmost concern to the Bengal-Burma Steam Navigation Company, an Indian concern, whose interest would suffer as a result of the separation from India.

In the meantime, the great mass movement of Civil Disobedience and the 'Salt March' were being planned by Mahatma Gandhi in India. All this was having repercussions in Burma, which was also demanding freedom. Jatindra Mohan's ship touched port at Rangoon on February 18 on his way back from Singapore. He and his wife were welcomed by a large crowd at the docks and they were taken in a huge procession to the meeting place where Jatindra Mohan was to deliver his speech.

## CHAPTER VI

### TRIAL IN BURMA

The separation of Burma from India was the subject of Jatindra Mohan's speech in Rangoon. The people of Burma were of two opinions as to the pros and cons of separation. Sir Charles Innes, the Governor of Burma, had told the Burmese that they could have a better chance of freedom, if Burma was separated from India. Many Indians in Burma, it was alleged, were being ill-treated and asked to leave the country. A raging controversy was taking place at the time when Jatindra Mohan was welcomed in Rangoon.

The usual polite introductory speeches were made in which Jatindra Mohan was praised as a great political leader, as the doyen of the Bengal lawyers and as Mahatma Gandhi's lieutenant. Most of the people who attended the meeting were anti-separation Indians and Burmans. "They all wanted to take advantage of the presence of so influential a political leader as Sen Gupta, and to get him to warn the Burmese of the danger they ran by cutting themselves off from the great Indian paladins, who were strong enough to stand up to them".\*

Jatindra Mohan rose to respond. He had not prepared his speech but was "an accomplished orator and had no difficulty in improvising". He really felt it was "lunacy on the part of the Burmans to think of standing alone at that juncture". What with Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement and the non-violent war, Burma would be out of the struggle if she separated. India would achieve

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\**Trials in Burma*, by Maurice Collis, p. 87

better terms and Burma would have been tricked by separation "into a constitution far less independent". "Had not Sir Charles Innes declared for separation and at the same time advised Sir John Simon that the Burmese were only fit as yet for a limited form of self-Government? If the Burmese were fools enough to take the bait, they were done for, and they would deserve the humiliation which was being prepared for them"\*

Two days later, Jatin addressed another audience in a public hall, the subject being "Indo-Burman *entente*". He wanted his audience not to trust the British if they wanted a free constitution; the Indians were the people to trust; they must all stand together.

A last speech was delivered on February 21 at Fytche Square, again under the shadow of the Soolay Pagoda. Mr. Abdul Bari Choudhury was in the chair. Again, Jatindra Mohan urged the Burmans to fight against separation.

Summaries of all three speeches appeared in the papers. The Criminal Investigation Department were also busy in taking notes. Later, when Jatindra Mohan was arrested and brought to trial in Rangoon, a full report was given by the Judge, Mr. Maurice Collis, which was reported in his book *Trials in Burma*. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Merriken, said to Mr. Collis on March 16, 1930: "Here is a warrant made out for Sen Gupta's arrest. The Governor-in-Council hopes you will sign it. You remember those speeches he made in Rangoon when he was here last month?"

Mr. Collis had replied to Merriken, saying: "I remember seeing in the newspapers that he was here, but I don't remember that he made a speech."

"He made three speeches and these are the transcripts of two of them" the Commissioner rejoined handing Mr.

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\**Trials in Burma, Op. cit.* p. 88

Collis a bunch of papers. "They are seditious," he went on, "and if you will read those portions which I have marked in blue pencil, I think you will agree with me".

Mr. Collis looked through the marked passages in one of them and noticed that Jatin had used some hard expressions about Sir Charles Innes.

"Has the Government Advocate's opinion been taken," Mr. Collis asked.

"Yes, the Government Advocate advises that a *prima facie* case of sedition lies", said Merriken.

"It seems rather an extreme course to arrest the Mayor of Calcutta and bring him down here, unless the speeches were very bad. At a casual glance, I see nothing much", remarked Mr. Collis.

"The Law Officers were satisfied a case lay" insisted Merriken.

"here is a case certainly," Mr. Collis admitted, "but is it of sufficient weight?"

"We have considered that", replied the Commissioner, adding, "The Governor-in-Council wishes to take action."

Mr. Collis was asked to sign the warrant as a routine measure. He observed in his book that his opinion was not sought either on the legal or on the executive aspects. He just signed and Mr. Merriken took his departure, but Mr. Collis knew that he would have to try Jatindra Mohan when he was brought to Rangoon as the so-called offence had taken place within his jurisdiction. "It was unusual for one provincial government to arrest a prominent public man residing under another provincial government on a charge of sedition committed within the area of the first. The excitement in Bengal would be intense, for Sen Gupta was probably among the five best known men in India at the time." This prosecution was different from that of an ordinary provincial prosecution. "The news of his arrest

would be news all the world over! it would appear at once in the London papers; the Indian Press would declare it proof, if proof were needed, of the heavy hand of the authorities.”\* Collis had also qualms of conscience whether he could convict Jatindra Mohan. To him, the case had not appeared too strong, but if he did not convict he “should be delivering the Government to wide public criticism.”\*

*\*Trials in Burma, Op. cit. p. 79*

## CHAPTER VII

### ARREST IN CALCUTTA

The warrant of arrest was given to two Burmese police officers on March 11, 1930. They arrived in Calcutta on March 13 and reported themselves to the Commissioner of Police. The Assistant Commissioner of the South District of the city then conducted the Burmese officers to Jatindra Mohan's Elgin Road flat. This was a surprise to Jatindra Mohan, as he did not feel that he had said anything seditious in Burma. He wanted to know why the Burmese authorities should arrest him and added, "Can it be those speeches?" He read the warrant and found he was accused of sedition and had to appear in the court at Rangoon on March 18, 1930.

The Assistant Commissioner said: "I am instructed to offer you bail in two sureties of five thousand rupees each."

"I refuse to furnish bail," replied Jatindra Mohan. The officer rang up the Police Commissioner informing him that the Mayor of Calcutta was to be taken away by the Burmese Government, and the latter said he knew all about it. The Police Commissioner was then informed that the Mayor would be allotted only a second class cabin to Burma, and he insisted that first class should be arranged. He further said that he would not be taken to the "lock up" in Calcutta if he gave a verbal assurance not to escape. But Jatindra Mohan would commit himself to no promises and finally the police made sure of his staying in his Elgin Road flat by keeping a police picket outside.

The next day, on March 14, Jatin was put on board a



mail boat and taken to Rangoon. The name of the boat was *S. S. Sirdhana*.

In the meantime, news of the arrest had caused a tremendous stir in the whole of Calcutta and a *hartal* was called. The members of the Corporation, astonished at their Mayor being arrested in Calcutta by the Burmese authorities, came to his flat while he was under house-arrest and asked him what he had said. Jatindra Mohan told them that he could not exactly remember what he had spoken, but it was mostly about Burma's separation from India which would mean that Burma would have to fight for freedom alone and would probably lose. All Corporation meetings were thereupon adjourned and a huge crowd gathered outside the Mayor's house. Friends and relatives came to say good-bye all through the night. The day happened to be that of the Holi festival.

An emergency meeting of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee was held and Jatindra Mohan was congratulated. A great send-off was arranged at Outram Ghat and special editions of papers were printed. Thousands walked to Outram Ghat as the police escort conducted the hero to his ship. Nellie Sengupta went with her husband, but only up to the ghat. She was not allowed to accompany him to Burma and her anxiety must indeed have been great as she knew he was a sick man suffering from high blood pressure. His earlier voyage to Singapore had, however, done him good and he was a little better. At the ghat, Jatindra Mohan and Nellie were received with tremendous ovations. So many garlands were piled on his shoulders that it was difficult to see his face. He had been smeared with red powder, because it was Holi. He looked flushed, but triumphant. As the boat was about to sail, he bade a touching farewell to his wife and family and gave two messages. One was to the Calcutta Corporation

in which he said he was a prisoner charged with sedition, and that through the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, he would like to request his colleagues in the Corporation to keep alive the ideals set by Deshbandhu C. R. Das. The other message was to Bengal, declaring that he was a prisoner, but happy to serve the country at the time of Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt March. "Let all stand behind the Mahatma's Banner," he pleaded. As a special request, he wanted no breach of the peace. The *hartal* in the city, as his ship sailed away, was complete. All schools, colleges and other institutions were empty. All the shops were closed and all transport was at a standstill.

A strangely realistic picture of Jatindra Mohan is given by Judge Collis. "The gangways were down and the ship began to move. A kind of frenzy seemed to shake the crowd as they saw their leader being taken from them. A cry went out: 'Down with the Union Jack'. Sengupta was at the rail, waving his hand. The shouts were kept up till he passed out of sight.

"As soon as he thought it politic to do so, he left the rail and went to his cabin, where he got rid of the garlands, washed the vermilion off his face, and changed out of his Indian clothes into a lounge suit. Then, descending to the dining saloon, he ordered breakfast. There was nothing sentimental about Sengupta. A realist, he knew that a lounge suit was the right dress in the first class cabin of an English ship, just as the national costume with garlands was right for a crowd of Bengali supporters. He was decidedly hungry after the excitements of the morning, and he liked a dish of eggs and bacon."\*

While this was obviously an Englishman's interpretation of Jatindra Mohan's forthright manner of living, it

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\**Trials in Burma, Op. cit.* p. 94

must be remarked that, like so many of Mahatma Gandhi's followers, Jatindra Mohan, just as much as Sarojini Naidu or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, believed in his own form of diet or dress. They never had to surrender their individuality to the Mahatma. One of the accusations often made against Jatindra Mohan was that, like many other Congress workers, he did not travel third class. He preferred the first often because, as he himself explained, a railway journey was the only time when he could find any rest from the scething mobs all around him. Often, the people expected too much from their leaders and were hard in their demands of self-sacrifice. Jatindra Mohan continued to travel first class despite criticism, and perhaps it is just as well he did, for he may otherwise have succumbed to the great strain of public life and national service even before the young age of 48.

In Calcutta, after the ship *S. S. Sirdhana* set sail, the Calcutta Corporation met and had a special meeting at which all European members were conspicuously absent. They passed the following resolution which was unanimously adopted :

- (1) That the Corporation places on record their sense of strong indignation at the arrest of Mr. J. M. Sengupta, Mayor and first citizen of Calcutta, who is held in high esteem by all sections of the people in the city.
- (2) That the Corporation regards this act of the Government of Burma as an unwarranted and calculated interference with the right of free speech. In the opinion of the Corporation, it is intended to stifle the free expression of public opinion and to strike at the root of the Nationalist Movement in India.
- (3) That the Corporation appreciates the attitude

taken by Mr. J. M. Sengupta in not accepting bail with the principles of a true satyagrahi.

- (4) That the Corporation values highly the services rendered by Mr. J. M. Sengupta to the country in general and to the Corporation in particular.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A JUDGE'S DILEMMA

In the meanwhile, Mr. Maurice Collis had received a record of the case from the Police in Burma and all relevant papers. But he noticed that no witnesses were to be called, "except formal evidence that the speeches had been delivered". He studied the speeches and thought, to quote his own words: "Were they, as I had supposed at first sight, more technically than actually seditious? I found it exceedingly difficult to make up my mind. As a rule, of course, a magistrate does not try to come to any sort of conclusion about a case until he has heard the evidence. But the present trial was rather different. All the evidence was already on the record, as the prosecution was calling no witnesses, the charge of sedition was founded on the written evidence of two of the three speeches."

After repeated perusal, Mr. Collis decided that he would have to take more evidence to form a complete picture. He decided to call some witnesses whether the prosecution liked it or not. The case, he knew, was weak, but the Governor, Sir Charles Innes, would not withdraw. "Sen Gupia had been arrested; he was on the sea and was due in Rangoon at 7 A.M. on 17th March. To suppose that on landing he could be informed that the case had been withdrawn was to suppose an impossibility."\* He could consult no one. He decided to ask Mr. Frank Fearnley Whittingstall, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, why the Governor had launched the prosecution.

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\**Trials in Burma, Op. cit. p. 95*

What was the real truth? Mr. Collis was told :

"He did not want Indian agitators poking their noses into Burma. Sen Gupta was maddening enough, of course—coming over here to upset the separation plan. Not only that, H. E. wants to keep Burma out of the Indian mix-up. When the C.I.D. drew his attention to the speeches, it seemed a wonderful opportunity to discourage fellows like Sen Gupta from putting ideas into Burmans' heads."

On March 17, Mr. Phipps, Superintendent of the River Police, was to meet *S. S. Sirdhana* and take Jatindra Mohan straight to Mr. Collis' house where Mr. Merriken, the Commissioner of Police, and Mr. Collis would await him. A big crowd met the ship—among them Bengalis in *khaddar*, monks and several Burmese women belonging to the revolutionary groups. Mr. Phipps, on seeing them, was so alarmed that "he gave orders that Sen Gupta's car should be driven out of the docks by a different gate. In that way, he hoped to shake them off. He did not fancy the idea of a procession through the town with the women yelling at him, nor did he care to think of arriving at my house in such company", comments Mr. Collis in his book.

Mr. Phipps met Jatindra Mohan in the saloon of the ship and took him quickly to the waiting car, but the crowd recognised "the tall figure of the Indian patriot. A blast was sounded on the conch; cries of *Bande Mataram* (Hail to the mother) were raised and they surrounded the car. Sen Gupta was then garlanded with roses." The Police car, however, managed to shoot out and was lost to sight. The crowd sought him, but did not realise that Jatindra Mohan had been driven to Mr. Collis' house.

When Jatindra Mohan reached Mr. Collis' house, "he was wearing no roses." He was received in the hall. "His manner was distant. He was a stout man, over six feet high, with a humorous expression; his shawl, which was

like a toga, gave him an air of the forum," writes Mr. Collis, "I took him into my study. It was still very early, hardly seven-thirty, and the sun was slanting into the garden." Jatindra Mohan sat down. Mr. Collis offered him a cup of tea, but Jatindra Mohan said he had had his tea. He regarded Mr. Collis with interest. "I understand", Mr. Collis said "that you have been ill and are still not strong".

"My blood-pressure remains rather high," he replied, "but this second voyage, which in the ordinary way I could not have afforded myself, has done me good".

"Your trial", Mr. Collis explained, "is fixed for tomorrow at 11 a.m. I have obtained the sanction of the High Court, and if you like you can have bail. The amount they fixed is nominal."

"I'm afraid I can't avail myself of bail. To do so would be to recognise your Court, and if I may say so without appearing rude, that is impossible."

Mr. Collis was galled. He could not believe that English courts, renowned for fairness, should have "some opposite reputation in India". He was pricked at a tender spot and determined to force Jatindra Mohan, before he was done with the case, to admit that his "court at least was as fair as any court could be". Jatin was offered house accommodation, strictly guarded, by Mr. Collis. It was accepted by him, but Mr. Merriken refused permission and Jatindra Mohan had to go to prison. When asked if Jatindra Mohan was arranging a counsel, he said "I am precluded from making a defence."

The unique position of Jatindra Mohan's case in Rangoon was that he was being tried by a judge who cared only for the law and fairplay and not for merely punishing a "naughty" Congressman who was trying to defy the "virtuous" British. If Sir Charles Innes had realised the

kind of magistrate before whom the case was to be tried, perhaps he would not have ordered the arrest of the Mayor of one of India's largest cities, to be brought all the way from India. Mr. Maurice Collis had the greatest respect for Jatindra Mohan of whom he writes : "As a man it was impossible for him to be otherwise than deeply interested in what I was doing on his behalf, as a politician, one of the leaders of a party which thrived on imprisonment, he deplored the line he observed me to be taking. The case against him was, in his opinion, such a monstrously poor one that a heavy sentence would make him a martyr. As a man he did not want to go to prison; as a politician he felt obliged to go, and because he was a brave and devoted man in his own line, his duty weighed with him more strongly than his personal comfort. So he was excited and disappointed at once. But all eyes were upon him; the Press of half Asia was in the court-room. his supporters were bellowing themselves hoarse in the street. He must be careful, let not a sign escape him." In this assessment, Mr. Collis was right; but he was wrong when he said that Jatindra Mohan's object was "to manoeuvre me (Mr. Collis) into passing upon him a heavy sentence for something he had not done." Mr. Collis has remarked in his book that Jatindra Mohan "knew that his original hope of making big capital out of the case was gone. He might be able to laugh at the Burma Government, but he would not be able to charge it with grave injustice."

It must be remembered that, at no time, did Jatindra Mohan even dream that the speeches which he gave, in spite of being ill and not wishing to exert himself during his round voyage to Singapore, would be considered as seditious speeches. No one could have got a greater shock than he did at being arrested in Calcutta for his speeches



in Burma. He behaved at the trial, having been forced to face it, as every Indian *satyagrahi* would—nobly, without defending himself, and striving to show that, by being indifferent to the proceedings, he was not a party to his absurd arrest and trial.

In fact, Jatindra Mohan's dignified behaviour and Mr. Collis' great sense of impartial justice created a precedent in Burma. When Mr. Collis, in the midst of the trial, invited some guests to dinner, there was much excitement. As he recounts : "The Sen Gupta trial had enlivened them all. It had been so full of incidents, it was such a human drama. Everyone was puzzled to know what I was going to do, and if I let off Sen Gupta, what the Government should do to me. Rumours of every kind had kept the town amused. It was said that I had been at School with Sen Gupta; that the Government of India had ordered the Burma Government to arrest Sen Gupta; that if I discharged Sen Gupta, Sir Charles would resign or alternatively that I should be sacked. It resulted that all the protagonists of the drama, Sen Gupta, Sir Charles, myself, with Mr. Eggar, Mr. Merriken, right down to Sergeant Ryan, had acquired a notoriety which, according to the Company, became a popularity or its reverse, but which in any case made us more interesting than we were before. Such mild excitements help the bored exile to remember without nostalgia the English winds of March and the bus traffic in Regent Street where it debouches into Piccadilly Circus." At the close of the dinner party, an English friend's advice to Collis was "get the law right if you can, and don't bother about the hullabaloo".

Mr. Collis had gone through Jatindra Mohan's speeches carefully and could not find anything very incriminating. He said that the worst phrase he could find in the speeches was when he called the Government "men of

sin" up to the second speech, the third was a little more seditious. Collis only found two extracts on the basis of which he could be charged. As Jatindra Mohan would not plead to the charges, sentence had to be passed immediately. A small fine? But Jatindra Mohan would not pay it. "It was therefore more sensible to sentence him to a short term of imprisonment without labour". He gave a sentence of 10 days' simple imprisonment.

It was approaching midnight when this decision was taken. Of that moment, Mr. Collis writes: "A great relief came over me. I was rid of all doubt now, certain that I had interpreted the law correctly. So closely had my mind been occupied with this task that I had forgotten about the Government and how my judgement would read from an executive point of view. In this happy state, I put away the papers, switched off the light and went upstairs".

Jatindra Mohan arrived at the court on March 18 in an open car, seated next to Mr. Hall of the Imperial Police. He received a tremendous ovation from the crowd, to which he acknowledged good-humouredly by waving to the crowd. Cries of "*Bande Mataram*" and "Victory to Sen Gupta" were heard on all sides. According to Mr. Collis, no Burmans seemed to have been in the crowd, only Indians. Squads of armed police were posted in large numbers, and the crowd, in spite of consisting only of Indians as Mr. Collis had remarked, was very large.

Jatindra Mohan entered the court and sat reading a paper, appearing to be indifferent to the proceedings. It was clear, however, that he was intrigued at Mr. Collis' behaviour. Outside, there was violence in the crowd and, on the third day, the Army had to be called in. Many were injured. Right through, Jatindra Mohan sat impassive and took no part in the trial. Mr. Collis describes

the famous trial, in its later stages, in his famous book\* in the chapter "Sen Gupta Smiles": "At the court, on March 22, the crowd was again large and the military police was ready to tackle any situation. Jatindra Mohan arrived at 10-45 A.M. The crowd was silent. At 11, Mr. Collis took his seat. Mr. Tyabji, who had had his head hurt previously in the fracas outside the court, was there in bandages. In India, it had been stated in the papers that the Burma Police had "brutally assaulted a crowd of orderly spectators and driven them with many casualties from the Court door".

To a question by Mr. Collis, Jatindra Mohan inadvertently answered "yes" and then realised his mistake. He was told he would be charged. "Asked 'Am I to understand that you do not wish to plead to these charges?', he should logically, of course, have remained silent with the appropriate expression of the man who refuses to recognise the right of the tyrant to judge him. But, as his case had been tried with such abounding, if inconvenient, fairness, his sense of humour prevented him from adopting so idiotic a pose, and he muttered something about being unable to answer any questions". When he heard the sentence, he smiled. "That was to be the cue. The whole nationalist Press would be told to smile. The case had failed to produce a martyrdom, but there was good material in it for laughing at Government, at least at the executive side". Here again, Mr. Collis makes out that Jatindra Mohan had courted martyrdom—which had never been his intention. All he did, according to Congress ideal was to make the best of a rather reasonless and pompous and quite unnecessary arrest.

On Jatindra Mohan's way to the Rangoon Central jail, he crowd cheered him. Mr. Merriken felt that ten days was too little. Jatindra Mohan was "a flaunting

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\**Trial in Burma*, p. 120, et seq

rebel" to him. Mr. Collis was aware that his judgement was "a severe slap in the face" to the Government.

The uproar began in the Press the next day. The *Leader* of Allahabad said that Burma had "erred egregiously". The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta remarked: "Mr. Sen Gupta went to Rangoon prepared for the worst. He certainly did not expect the cheap martyrdom thus thrust upon him". Leaders felt that the law had been "brought into contempt" or made "a huge joke". Gandhiji remarked in *Young India* : "if disaffection is a crime and Section 124 A has any reality about it, I, who made sedition a religion, should have been tried and heavily punished long ago. But the Government is afraid in the face of world opinion; the policy of non-violent revolution is right; victory in the near future is certain".

The *Statesman* took the anti-Indian trend by saying that the light sentence must have been a disappointment to Jatindra Mohan and that "at least one of their martyrdoms has been a dismal failure".

In Delhi, in the Legislative Assembly, the reason for the arrest was demanded. One member said that the Government of Burma and the Government of India had made themselves thoroughly ridiculous by the way in which they had prosecuted Mr. Sen Gupta and the President had to cry "Order, Order".

Collis realised that British prestige had not been maintained by his sticking to the letter of the law. On the other hand, by his judgement, he had proved the justice of British law and had therefore raised the prestige of the British, and hundreds of Englishmen in England agreed with Mr. Collis.

Mr. Collis went to see Jatindra Mohan in jail on the fourth day. He was confined in the European Ward and a curtain hung on his door. The Jailor said : "Mr. Sen

Gupta, the District Magistrate would like to speak to you". He came out with Lamb's *Essays* in his hand. They sat in the corridor in two deck-chairs and a portable fan was arranged. Jatindra Mohan said he was quite comfortable, but drew the attention of Mr. Collis to the prisoner opposite—a Eurasian boy who had stolen 50,000 cigarettes and had been convicted by Mr. Collis to 9 months' hard labour. His hands were bleeding due to the work of stripping husks given to him. Jatindra Mohan decided to see Collis on his release and thank him. When released after 8 days, he stayed with Mr. Sen, the brother of Mr. Justice Sen of the Rangoon High Court. Jatindra Mohan was released on Sunday and addressed a meeting in Fytche Square on Monday and repeated what he said in previous speeches, but in a colourless manner. He went to see Mr. Collis in the evening. He left his shawl outside and, in burning spirits, entered the drawing room. He drank barley water and then more or less explained why he had made adverse remarks against the judgement that afternoon in Fytche Square. He had said: "Judgements like yours are no good to us. They cramp our style". He told Mr. Collis, "I had to speak to the crowd like that. You see, in six days, Gandhi begins non-violent Civil Disobedience. We are all to break the Salt Law. Thousands of us will go to prison. I could not praise British justice at the very moment when we want to prove that it does not exist".

He would scarcely be home before he would be arrested again, Jatindra Mohan had told Mr. Collis, and admitted that though he could not acknowledge the fairness of the trial in public, Collis had won. As a gift, Collis gave him a white jade lion whose tail blossomed into a lotus. Jatin placed it in his pocket on his heart. Saying good-bye, he took his shawl and climbed into his car.

Within a few weeks of arriving in Calcutta, he was

again in jail in India with Mahatma Gandhi and over 50,000 other people. Nine months later, on November 10, 1931, Collis saw Jatindra Mohan in London at the Victoria Station. They shook hands. Collis writes : "I never saw him again. After the Conference\*, he was arrested as he landed at Bombay, in the last drive against the Congress. Worn out, his health shattered, he died not long afterwards".

It is said that the Burma Government did not like Mr. Collis' behaviour and removed him to the Excise Department. He was never brought back to the judicial side. In later days, Mr. Collis came to dinner at Nellie Sen Gupta's flat in Calcutta.

Jatindra Mohan was released in Rangoon on March 30, 1930, and reached Calcutta on April 3, three days before Mahatma Gandhi reached Dandi at the end of his historic march. Mr. C. C. Biswas, the Government-nominated Councillor of the Calcutta Corporation, who was a strong critic of Jatindra Mohan, made a speech praising him and his work. This goes to show how much Jatindra Mohan was respected even by those who opposed him. Mr. C. C. Biswas said : "I am sure, we are all with Mr. J. M. Sen Gupta. He has been released after a short term of imprisonment which he has undergone after a farcical trial. He, however, took up an attitude worthy of him and of the principles in which he believed and in that he has raised himself in the estimation of every member of the House (hear, hear). Without doubt, everyone is looking forward to his return and it would be very pleasing, indeed, if he came back to the Corporation. I had an occasion to bear testimony to his great tact, to his great skill and, above all, to his great impartiality in the Chair (hear, hear). Speaking for myself, I do not mind acknowledging publicly that,

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\*The Second Round Table Conference.

in my judgement, he had maintained very worthily the traditions of the Chair of which the first occupant was the late Mr. C. R. Das". (Applause)

On April 3, there was a far bigger crowd at Outram Ghat than when Jatindra Mohan was taken away to Burma. He was received with a tremendous ovation. This spontaneous jubilation and expression of love touched the Mayor deeply. The demonstration was not a mere emotional outburst, but an expression of real deep feelings. Jatindra Mohan was seated in an open car. Behind him was a mile-long procession of cars. Crowds packed both sides of the road. When he arrived at the Central Municipal Office, he was royally received. The employees gave him an address and Mr. J. C. Mukherjee, the Chief Executive Officer, read it out. As Jatindra Mohan, by now, was feeling very tired, Mr. Mukherjee thanked the employees on his behalf. A special holiday was declared for all Corporation offices and schools. Later, a big meeting was held in Shraddha-nanda Park under the presidentship of Sir P. C. Ray. After speeches by other leaders, Sir P. C. Ray said that the country was fortunate to have a selfless leader like Deshapriya J. M. Sengupta and that a country with such people would certainly win freedom.

## CHAPTER IX

### PRISON AND MAYOR AGAIN

The Salt March to Dandi had started on March 12 and the Civil Disobedience Movement had grown in momentum while Jatin was in Burma. In Calcutta, students decided to read proscribed books as a part of the civil disobedience. In the districts of Bengal which were near the sea, such as Midnapur and Chittagong, salt marches were organised. The Government was all the time closely watching the situation.

When Jatin returned to Calcutta, the students came to him for advice. Seeing their determination, he gave his consent to their reading proscribed literature in public. On April 11, it was decided that a meeting should be held in College Square and this programme was duly notified. There was a big crowd and the police were present with arms. As soon as the meeting started and the literature was read, speaker after speaker was arrested. The agitation grew and a clash with the police ensued. Many were injured and removed to hospital. A large police force came and dispersed the crowd. Jatindra Mohan stressed the need for non-violence and impressed upon the students that their success would be possible only if they had patience and used peaceful methods. The students promised to be peaceful and organised another meeting at Cornwallis Square. Jatindra Mohan's friends and advisers begged him not to get arrested by reading proscribed literature as he was an all-India leader and if he was arrested now, it would not be possible to keep the movement on a par with the Civil Disobedience movement in other parts



of India. Mahatma Gandhi had not consented to a general Civil Disobedience Campaign but had authorised only the breaking of the Salt Law. They felt that, without Mahatma Gandhi's consent, he should not undertake a Civil Disobedience Campaign. Jatindra Mohan listened carefully to all the advice, but he had given permission to the students and he could not see how he could stay out of the movement.

On April 12, there was a large crowd in Cornwallis Street and the reading of proscribed literature started. Many had been arrested before Jatindra Mohan went to the meeting. When he heard of the arrests, he proceeded to Cornwallis Street, in spite of his friends begging him not to go. When he arrived there, a great shout went up of "Jatindra Mohan Ki Jai". The students felt impressed that this great leader of all-India stature had sided with them. They were greatly moved. Some people criticised him as being too precipitate. On the other hand, many thought he was a real man of honour and humble enough to associate with the students.

As Jatindra Mohan arrived, the armed police surrounded the people around him. A flag-pole had been planted and on it the national flag was hoisted now by Jatindra Mohan. The police did not stop this; but, when the meeting started, the Deputy Commissioner of Police came to Jatindra Mohan and showed him the report of the arrests made on the previous day.

Undaunted, Jatindra Mohan took up a proscribed book, *The Call of the Country*, and the police then tried to snatch it away from him. But they could not succeed. The policemen arrested him and asked him to sit on a chair. Students and other citizens who tried to read the book were also arrested. After this, Jatindra Mohan declared the meeting closed. There had been no violence. The Black

Maria came and took Jatindra Mohan and four students to prison.

It was during this period of incarceration that Jatindra Mohan was elected Mayor of Calcutta for the fifth time on April 29, 1930. Sarat Bose was chairman of the meeting. Dr. B. C. Roy proposed Jatindra Mohan's name and he was unanimously elected.

As Jatindra Mohan was in prison at the time, he could not take the oath of office within the prescribed period. The Mayoral chair, therefore, fell vacant again. Jatindra Mohan sent a message to his wife Nellie and said he did not want to be a candidate for Mayorship any more. Subhas Bose was then elected the Mayor.

## CHAPTER X

### IN AND OUT OF PRISON

The Civil Disobedience Movement was in full swing and many Congress organisations had been declared unlawful when Jatindra Mohan was released on September 25, 1930. Even the Working Committee of the Congress was invalid and inoperative. The entire supreme power had, therefore, to be vested in one powerful leader. As soon as one leader was arrested, the power passed to the next in line. Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested and his successor was to be appointed. Motilal Nehru chose Jatindra Mohan and he was nominated as the Acting President of the Congress.

After his release, he had not been able to rest as he had to travel all over India. He visited Patna, Allahabad and Delhi before reaching Amritsar on October 25. At the public meeting in Jallianwalla Bagh, as Jatindra Mohan stood up to speak, the police served a notice on him which he would not accept till he had finished his speech. The police officer then read out the contents while Jatindra Mohan went on speaking. He was then arrested for violating the prohibitory orders under Section 144 I.P.C., on the strength of a warrant issued for his arrest by the authorities in Delhi. He was taken to Delhi, where he was tried and sentenced to imprisonment for a year. Nellie Sengupta and Aruna Asaf Ali then addressed meetings in the Queen's Garden, Delhi, and both of them were arrested for making seditious speeches. This was the first time that Nellie went to jail. She had made the following speech in Delhi after hoisting the flag :

I am sure every small boy and girl, present here, will

learn to look upon this flag as the most valued thing in his or her life and will never allow it to be insulted and will honour and respect it whenever and wherever they see it. I am unfurling the National flag. I feel a thrill in my heart and I am sure you will do the same, for I feel confident that the devotion to this flag of ours and the will to keep it flying aloft at all times and in all circumstances will bring complete freedom for this great Indian nation.

These arrests caused a tremendous resentment and the Amritsar Municipality passed a resolution strongly condemning the Government's action.

On hearing about the news of Jatindra Mohan's arrest, a meeting of the Calcutta Corporation was convened on October 29. A European member objected to an adjournment which the Councillors demanded as a protest against the arrest. The Corporation was, however, closed for the whole day and there was a *hartal* in Calcutta. In an Editorial, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* said :

The expected has happened. Sj. Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, the Acting President of the Congress, has been convicted by the District Magistrate of Delhi of sedition as also of an offence under the Criminal Law Amendment Act and another under the Instigation Ordinance. The sentences passed on him are a year's simple imprisonment for sedition and six month's simple imprisonment on each of the two charges, and they will run concurrently. The ex-Mayor of Calcutta and the Acting President of the Indian National Congress will therefore have to suffer incarceration for a period of one year and the country will be deprived of his wise counsel and mature judgement for a

period of twelve months. It was only the other day that this brave and self-sacrificing son of Bengal came out of jail and while a man of S. Sen Gupta's stamp will not mind this fresh incarceration, the country cannot but deplore it and the more so as he has not been keeping good health for some time past.

Jatin and Nellie were held in the same jail in Delhi. An "infections" ward in the prison was vacant and was allotted to the couple. Here, Nellie made a happy home. Her family visited her and they even acquired a puppy which kept them amused and relieved a little the boredom of prison life. Nellie started learning the mandolin with her characteristic high spirits, for she seldom gave way to depression and was always ebullient and happy. Later, when she was released, an acquaintance asked her where she had been all these months, not knowing she had been in prison, and she answered with a laugh, "Oh, I've only been in jail and I've tried to learn to play the mandolin".

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT

While most of the Congress leaders were in jail, two moderate politicians started efforts for a settlement. They were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar. They had seen Lord Irwin and then went to Mahatma Gandhi in Yervada Jail. They also contacted Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru in Naini Jail and negotiated with the Government for their transfer to the Yervada prison. Motilal was not well at the time and was released along with Jawaharlal and Ranjit Sitaram Pandit.

When Lord Irwin agreed to discuss matters, he released Mahatma Gandhi and invited him to Delhi. A pact was finally worked out and an announcement was made. The Congress Working Committee members were then released. Peace was restored and the Mahatma decided to attend the Second Round Table Conference as the only representative of the Congress.

Jatindra Mohan and Nellie were also released on January 27, 1931. They left for Calcutta together with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. At Howrah station, they received a grand reception. They were profusely garlanded and a massive procession of cars and carriages proceeded from Howrah station to Calcutta. Thousands of people lined the streets and the hero and heroine were showered with flower petals, rose-water and sandal all along the route.

From Calcutta, Jatindra Mohan and his wife went direct to Chittagong where they were given a loving reception on their arrival back home. The streets from the station to the house were crowded with people eager to wel-

come their hero and heroine. Five arches had been erected along the route which he was to take.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact had only provided for the release of non-violent prisoners, and those who belonged to the revolutionary party were still in jail. The revolutionary group disapproved of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and all the jubilation which had followed. Jatindra Mohan was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi and believed implicitly in non-violence. Though he realised that the revolutionaries were also great patriots, he always felt that *swaraj* could never be won through violent methods. He was, therefore, criticised strongly by the revolutionaries of Bengal. Now, on the release of the non-violent prisoners as a result of the pact, the revolutionaries said that Gandhi only supported his non-violent group and that the terrorists had been let down. This feeling was strong in Chittagong which was a centre of the revolutionary movement and which would have been far more in the revolutionary camp had it not been for Jatindra Mohan's moderating influence and his own undaunted belief in the Mahatma's creed. While he was being welcomed home, a black flag was presented to him by a revolutionary boy called Madhusudan. The boy who gave Jatindra Mohan the flag was surprised when the leader accepted it quietly and with courtesy.

The Chittagong Armoury Raid Case had been going on for some time. A raid on a military camp in Chittagong had been made by young Indians who disguised themselves in military uniforms and managed to shoot down some officers. Terrible reprisals had followed. The revolutionaries were, therefore, very sore. When the boy presented the flag to Jatindra Mohan, he was about to speak to him when his admirers pulled the boy away and angrily pushed him out. Some of the students, who admired Jatindra Mohan, gave the boy a few blows. Though Jatindra Mohan managed to

stop the boy from being beaten up further, the boy swore his revenge. Jatindra Mohan told the crowd that if Madhusudan had been beaten by his followers, he was indeed very troubled that they were following the creed of violence just as much as the revolutionaries. He himself was not angry with the misguided boy; then why were they so worked up? Everyone had a right to have his own views and to disagree with others. The boy had been brave enough openly to declare his disapproval of Jatindra Mohan. He would have discussed the matter with the boy if he had been allowed to do so. He wished very much to meet Madhusudan again. By this time, the procession had started and there was a big crowd. It went to the cinema hall where Jatindra Mohan delivered a speech to a huge audience. He declared that Hindu society suffered from many evils and that its morals were sinking fast; many social evils had to be combated. Mahatma Gandhi, he said, was giving the lead in eradicating untouchability and felt that caste must be abolished. While Jatindra Mohan was speaking, there was a noise and an angry argument was heard outside. Madhusudan had now returned to take his revenge on the boy who had hit him. He gave Jatindra Mohan's misguided admirer a resounding blow with a stick and ran away. The wounded lad was brought on to the dais and Jatindra Mohan bemoaned the fact that there was this clash between the violent and non-violent patriotic elements in Chittagong. He explained that Mahatma Gandhi had not asked for the release only of the non-violent prisoners when he agreed to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. He told them that Gandhiji had done his best, but it had not been possible for him to secure the freedom of those who practised violence. Finally, he felt, all would be released but that violence anyway would never secure independence as the British were strong and could easily put down a violent uprising with



their arms. He stressed that the British would not be able to fight peaceful agitations.

After his speech, a number of Associations in Chittagong presented addresses to Jatindra Mohan. A purse of Rs. 5,000 was presented by Maulvi Abdul Khaleque Chaudhuri which Jatindra Mohan accepted for the relief of North Bengal flood victims.

At the Karachi Congress Session in the spring of 1931, a large number of people wanted Jatindra Mohan to be the next President of the Congress, but he withdrew in favour of Sardar Patel who was elected the next President. One group wished to oppose the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, as they said the Pact made it appear as if the independence of India depended entirely on the will of the British. Jawaharlal Nehru moved a resolution to accept the Pact. It was opposed by Jamnadas Mehta. Seconding Jawaharlal Nehru's resolution, Jatindra Mohan spoke eloquently and was given a tremendous ovation. He said that the power of the Congress and the nation itself would achieve Independence, and the old British connection of master and slave had to end now. Criticising the opposition for its demand of complete severance with the British, he expressed his confidence that the nation was very strong under the Mahatma's guidance and, with one stroke, it could overthrow British rule. He declared that the Congress was not bound to attend the Round Table Conference, but it was bound by the terms of the truce, and if a single prisoner was not released, it would be a breach of the agreement.

Continuing, Jatindra Mohan said : "Remember that never in the history of modern India did you see the spectacle of the high and mighty British Government in India talking, negotiating and pleading on equal terms with Mahatmaji, the representative of the Indian nation. For the first time in the history of modern India has this been

done, namely, recognition of the power behind that frail man, the power of the nation. He offered to negotiate because he knew that behind the Indian National Congress was the strength of the whole nation. It is for you to say, 'We did not break the truce terms and we, Congressmen, led by the greatest of all honourable men, Mahatmaji, did not fail in the balance of honour and honesty of the Indian nation'. The opposition to the resolution was silenced after Jatindra Mohan's speech.

Soon after the Karachi Congress, Jatindra Mohan was invited to preside over the Kerala Provincial Conference in May 1931. The invitation came from a distant part of India and showed how well known and popular Jatindra Mohan was in all parts of the country. His speech in Kerala was illuminating. He thanked the people for inviting him and said: "A great patriot once said, what a public man could enjoy, next to the approbation of his own countrymen, was the confidence of his fellow-men". He reminded the people that the nation, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, had suffered and achieved a great deal during the last twelve months. "Who reads the life of Mahatma Gandhi and the story of the great organisation, of which he is the accredited leader, whose pulse does not beat at the name of Dandi, and whose nature is not deeply thrilled at the contemplation of the prestige that the Congress has gained in the eyes of the world?", said Jatindra Mohan. He further emphasised that it was due to the massive support of the people for Mahatma Gandhi that the British Government actually thought fit to negotiate with him—an event which never happened before in Indian history; Lord Irwin being convinced of the strength of the people and their capacity to fight a non-violent battle "felt it was impossible for him to carry on the administration for any length of time by ordinances

and proclamations". Jatindra Mohan ended with the resounding words : "The country will not be satisfied, the Congress will not be satisfied with anything else or less than a political status in which she will be able to exercise her inherent right of controlling her internal administration and foreign affairs. There can be no compromise with the principle of political sovereignty".

## CHAPTER XII

### THREE CALAMITIES

In the monsoon season of 1931, Jatindra Mohan was invited by the Governor of Bengal to discuss the question of restoring peace and controlling the revolutionary groups who were responsible for political killings. The Governor wanted to explore the possibilities of bringing about a settlement between the Government and the people. Jatindra Mohan agreed to make an enquiry. He went to the internment camps in Baxar and Hijli and met the revolutionary prisoners there. After talking to them, he was on his way back to Darjeeling to meet the Governor when all at once he was informed of the unfortunate incident of the killing of a Police Inspector, Tarini Mukherjee, by terrorists in Chandpur. The Governor told him that he was determined to suppress these violent excesses. Jatindra Mohan had not even heard in detail of this new attack and was wholly ignorant of what had happened, but he realised that the Governor's attitude had hardened and he felt there was no longer any purpose in talking to the Governor.

Three calamities now occurred in Bengal which had far-reaching consequences and also caused much sorrow in the Province. The first was the devastating flood in North Bengal, the second was the organised looting of Hindu homes in Chittagong, and the third was the firing in Hijli camp and the death of two detenues. These three incidents came to be closely associated with Jatindra Mohan's political career.

The floods in August 1931 resulted from unprecedentedly heavy rains in Jalpaiguri, Pabna, Bagura and Rajshahi.

These districts were seriously affected. A relief society was set up with Sir P. C. Ray as President and Satish Chandra Das Gupta as Secretary. The society was called the Sankat Taran Samiti. The Bengal Provincial Congress and the Ramakrishna Mission also started their relief measures. People came to Jatindra Mohan and begged him to visit the affected areas. Hearing all the terrible tales of woe, Jatindra Mohan went with his faithful follower, Kshitish Ganguli, to the affected areas in North Bengal. The crew members of the steamer in which Jatindra Mohan travelled were mostly Muslim *khalasis* from Chittagong and they were very excited about having such a great leader with them. Seeing their spontaneous affection and respect for him, he realised how well he was loved by both Hindus and Muslims. Wherever he travelled in North Bengal, thousands met him at the ghats and called him the "Viceroy of Mahatma Gandhi". People crowded round the steamer in small boats and it was sometimes difficult for the steamer to move. Jatindra Mohan was greatly moved when he saw the suffering and the distress on all sides. In the face of such distress, the Government insisted on proclaiming that nothing very serious had happened.

When Jatindra Mohan arrived at Porjana, he received some letters and telegrams from Calcutta. One telegram announced that looting had started the day before in Chittagong as a result of the murder of a Police Inspector named Ahsanulla, a Muslim. This had resulted in a communal riot. The people of Chittagong now appealed to their leader, Jatindra Mohan, to return to them immediately. Jatindra Mohan did not know what to do as he was needed both in the flood-stricken area and in Chittagong. Both were serious calamities. He finally decided that he would go to Chittagong and return later to North Bengal. But the storm and rain were so heavy that he could hardly move. The people

asked him to stay back at least until the weather cleared, but he insisted on leaving for Chittagong at once. A motor-launch was arranged. On the way back, he found the rivers crowded with the boats of people who had come to see him. Thousands of others lined the banks. Every five minutes he had to greet the people. He became very tired as he had to climb on to the deck often, and so he sat on the open deck with an umbrella held over his head while he waved to the people on all sides and greeted them as his launch passed by. . .

At the time of the rioting in Chittagong, Mr. Nelson, the Divisional Commissioner, was away on tour. He expressed profound sorrow and was very angry when he returned and found the place in shambles. He ordered the Gurkha troops and police to be brought out and the looting was stopped, but no attempt was made to recover the property. The Press did not publish much news about the riots as it seemed to have been censored and no news was allowed to be sent to Calcutta.

Mahim Chandra Das left for Calcutta to give a real picture to the Press and to seek Jatindra Mohan's help. Das met Jatindra Mohan at his house. He latter had just returned from a tour of the flood-stricken areas of North Bengal. At a meeting in the Albert Hall, Das and Jatindra Mohan vividly described the oricals of the Hindu population. It was resolved to set up an enquiry commission. This commission left immediately for Chittagong. When they arrived, the Hindus welcomed them with great relief. Mr. Nelson, the Divisional Commissioner, and Mr. Kemp, the District Magistrate, invited Jatindra Mohan to discuss the situation with them. They asked the Hindu traders to reopen their shops, which they had not as yet done, despite Government assurances. Jatindra Mohan extracted a promise from the Government that there would be no repetition

of the looting and pillage, and also that the police and the Gurkhas would not commit any more atrocities. When these assurances were given, the city and its suburbs slowly returned to normal. Jatindra Mohan was also given freedom to hold an enquiry.

A detailed enquiry revealed many untoward happenings. Jatindra Mohan now became more of an idol; his bold behaviour at this time of distress further endeared him to the people. He undertook a tour of the village where the atrocities had been worse than in Chittagong city. He had to walk, at times, for long distances and also to subsist on very meagre and bad food. Wherever he went, thousands followed him and he kept assuring the people that they need have no fear. After the enquiry, Jatindra Mohan wrote a letter to the District Magistrate giving a vivid description of the communal trend of affairs. On September, 28, 1931, the report was published. Its release to the public caused a sensation in Bengal.

The third calamity of this tragic time had been the firing on prisoners, on September 16, 1931, in the Hijli detention camp. Two prisoners—Santosh Kumar Mitra and Tarakeshwar Sen Gupta—were killed and ten others injured, some very seriously. Mitra was the Vice-President of the Central Calcutta Congress Committee and the Secretary of the Calcutta City Congress League. Tarakeshwar Sen Gupta came from Barisal and was a well known worker in the freedom movement. When the news was conveyed to Jatindra Mohan, he left the very next morning for Hijli and tried his best to enter the camp, but was not admitted. He went to Kharagpur and interviewed the injured prisoners in hospital and obtained some information. He also arranged for a train to take the dead bodies of the victims to Calcutta. The bodies were received by a great crowd at Calcutta and were then taken in an immense procession to the

Keoratala cremation ground. Rabindranath Tagore felt greatly disturbed at the shooting. Though ailing, he presided over a protest meeting at the Town Hall on September 16. When the Bengal Government realised that there may be trouble over the shooting, they announced the appointment of an enquiry committee with the late Mr. Justice S. C. Mallik as Chairman. The Enquiry Committee, in its report, said that though there was justification for the police to have rushed in after hearing the alarm, there was no need at all for them to have fired at the prisoners.

At the meeting of the Calcutta Corporation on September 28, the Hijli shooting was also discussed. Jatindra Mohan characterised the Hijli firing as "wholly unjustified" and amounting to "culpable homicide".



## CHAPTER XIII

### VISIT TO ENGLAND

The strenuous life Jatindra Mohan had to lead at this time did considerable harm to his health and his blood pressure rose dangerously high. His friends and his doctors advised him to stop working. They suggested that he should go abroad for rest. He did not wish to leave the country at such a time of crisis, but his health was rapidly deteriorating. He, therefore, consented to go to England, though he was in extremely straitened financial circumstances. He was heavily involved in debt due to his political activities. He earned nothing while he had a family to maintain. He would not prosecute his tenants in Chittagong and Barama for not paying their dues. Not knowing whom to turn to, he took a loan on his life insurance policy which helped him to go to England.

Jatin and Nellie sailed for England in October 1931. The rest during the long sea voyage gave him great relief, physically as well as mentally.

On arrival in England, Jatindra Mohan and Nellie went to see Mrs. Grey whom they had not met for many years. She was overjoyed to have her daughter and son-in-law back. She had heard all about Jatindra Mohan from Nellie's weekly letters from India. She felt very proud that her son-in-law was now a national hero and that her daughter had played a courageous role in India's struggle for freedom. It was indeed a happy home-coming for Nellie, who loved her mother so much that she had always grieved for having left her mother alone in England.

Mahatma Gandhi was then in England for the Second

Round Table Conference and Jatindra Mohan met him there. Gandhiji praised Jatin for the manner in which he had handled the shooting episode in the Hijli Detention Camp.

Jatindra Mohan found himself once again in the thick of work. He refused to relax when there was so much to do in England and became as busy with politics as he was in India. Jatindra Mohan addressed a meeting arranged by the India League at the House of Commons. He told the audience that the time had come when India could no longer be ruled from India House, 6000 miles away. He declared that many atrocities were taking place and it was not democratic for such a Government to continue. He stressed that Indians must be allowed to rule their own country, and those Britishers who chose to reside in India should not govern the country, but merely carry on their business.

When Mahatma Gandhi returned to India, he found that what little good feeling was shown at the beginning of the Round Table Conference had completely disappeared and all the leaders, including Jawaharlal, had again been put in Jail. Gandhiji felt that this was a breach of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. He sent a telegram to the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, asking for a meeting. The Viceroy refused this request. Gandhiji again asked for an interview which was also refused. Then he issued a statement condemning the actions of the Government, after which he was arrested and sent to Yervada Jail. Subhas Bose was also arrested in Bengal.

All these events greatly depressed Jatindra Mohan and he cut short his holiday in England and returned home. On his way back, he visited Paris where he was received by Indian students. A reception was given in his honour and he addressed a large meeting explaining the political

situation in India and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. He took an Italian ship from Genoa for the voyage home. During the few happy days on board, things moved fast in India. Jatindra Mohan had perhaps guessed that these would be his last free days, though his wife suspected nothing. All the outstanding leaders in India were being jailed and the Civil Disobedience Movement was again in full swing. On January 20, 1932, as his ship steamed into Bombay port, the local police boarded it. Even before the ship had anchored, the police wanted to arrest Jatindra Mohan, but the Captain strongly objected. It was an Italian ship and the British had no authority to arrest anyone on board. So, the police had to go ashore and take the permission of the Italian Consulate to arrest Jatindra Mohan. As he descended the gangway, he was arrested under Regulation III of 1818.

His son, Shisir, had come to meet him along with the two faithful followers of Deshapriya, Kshitish Ganguly and Dwijen Kundu. Jatindra Mohan's niece, Eileen had come from England to India with her uncle and aunt, for the first time in her life. It must have been a great shock to her to see her much-loved uncle being taken away by the police for no cause whatsoever. The police would not even tell the family where Jatindra Mohan was being imprisoned. Poor Nellie went straight to the Magistrate in Bombay before whom Jatindra Mohan had been taken, but he refused to tell her where they were going to incarcerate her husband. Thus, they were separated. Nellie with her son, Shisir, and her niece, Eileen, went to Calcutta. Dwijen Babu, however, stayed back and tracked the police car in which his beloved leader was being taken away. He found out that they were going to imprison him in Darjeeling. This was about the worst place that the authorities could have chosen as the height was bound to raise his

blood pressure, which in fact it did. Also, Jatindra Mohan had been whisked away in such a hurry that he had no warm clothes with him. The callous manner in which the British behaved cannot be understood even today. When Jatindra Mohan's family heard that he was in Darjeeling jail as a State prisoner, they hurried there with warm clothes, for it was bitterly cold there in January. Kshitish Babu took the clothes and sought permission to see him in prison but was not allowed to do so.

In the meantime, Jatindra Mohan's blood pressure rose high and he suffered incessantly from headache. He realised that it would be fatal if he was kept at such a height. He had a telegram sent to his wife who immediately left for Darjeeling the next day. She was most perturbed to see her husband looking very ill. She sent telegrams to high officials, including the Governor of Bengal, drawing attention to the serious condition of her husband's health. Within two days, three European doctors arrived and examined Jatindra Mohan, but said nothing. This was perhaps the most cruel cut they could have given the anxious family, and the doctors must have known how Nellie and Jatindra Mohan's dear ones suffered. They felt that the official doctors could have been more sympathetic with them. Soon, however, he was brought down to the Jalpaiguri jail and an allowance of Rs. 1000 a month was given to his family as he was being detained without a trial. In fact, he had done nothing unlawful, but had been arrested on returning to India merely because all leaders were being imprisoned. Jatindra Mohan was kept imprisoned in Jalpaiguri for over a year without trial. His health did not improve. Here he was given, as a personal servant, an ex-convict who had been jailed for murder. His name was Pagla. Jatindra Mohan gave him so much sincere friendship that Pagla always remained grateful. After a

time, Jatindra Mohan was brought to the Calcutta Medical Hospital as a prisoner-patient in February 1933. Here, he was allowed to walk about and his family went regularly to see him. Thousands used to gather outside the gates of the hospital and watch him from College Street as he walked in the hospital compound. Though good care was taken of him, his high blood pressure was persistent and he seldom felt well. All the political parties now started contacting him surreptitiously for advice. Some people, at this time, begged him to give up politics so that he could be released and his health could improve, but he refused and went on suffering with stoic determination.

## CHAPTER XIV

### NELLIE AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT

In 1933, while Jatindra Mohan was still in the Medical College Hospital as a prisoner-patient, it was proposed that the Annual Session of the Congress should be held in Calcutta. The Congress was, at this time, banned by the Government. Office-bearers elected by the Congress were arrested and jailed. Thus, President after President went to prison. Nellie Sengupta was then asked to be the next President. There was a great element of risk involved in accepting this offer as the situation was by no means normal. After consulting her husband, she consented to accept the honour and became the President of the Indian National Congress. She was the third woman to be the President of the Congress, the first two being Annie Besant (1917) and Sarojini Naidu (1925). The time and place where Nellie was to read the Congress manifesto were not declared as it was feared the police would break up the proceedings.

On the appointed date, people began to gather in groups at the Esplanade Tram Depot, but not openly as they knew that the police would be waiting. The police had closed all parks and open spaces so that the Congress session could not be held in the town. The Tram Depot was, therefore chosen as the venue. Suddenly, at 4 P.M. sharp, bugles were sounded from Chittaranjan Avenue, Bentinck street, Dharamtala Street and thousands of Congress volunteers ran to the *goomti* in the Tram Depot shouting "*Bande Mataram*". Nellie had arrived by car a little earlier together with her brother-in-law, Ranendra Mohan. When

she heard the bugles, she stepped out of the car and went quickly to the place where the people were shouting "*Bande Mataram*". Hundreds ran to the meeting place and she was proposed and seconded as President. Quickly, Nellie started reading the Congress pledge in a loud and clear voice. She had hardly uttered a few words when the police, who were hidden in all corners, swooped down on the Congress crowd and dispersed it by charging them with staves. Truck-loads of police came from Lal Bazar and surrounded the meeting place and mercilessly lashed out at the assembled people. A large number of people were arrested. Ranendra Mohan was in the midst of this turmoil and helplessly saw the policemen take his sister-in-law away to jail in a waiting Black Maria. Though the meeting had been perfectly peaceful, the police struck people across their faces with canes and cruelly beat them up. Blood flowed freely, but the people continued to shout "*Bande Mataram*". They were again and again attacked but they never retaliated with any form of violence. It was a soul-stirring scene. The great courage which Nellie Sengupta showed was worth recording in letters of gold, for she knew that the police would resort to violence and yet she accepted the role of the Congress President and read out the Congress pledge.

Ranendra Mohan went home and received a telephonic message from the Police Commissioner informing him that his sister-in-law could be released if she agreed to sign a bond acquiescing to appear before the Magistrate when required. Ranendra Mohan took this message to his brother in the hospital. Jatin instructed that his wife was to undertake no agreement. Accordingly, she refused and was taken to prison where she was put in a tin shed along with many other Congress prisoners. When Ranendra Mohan went to see her, she was in a pitiable state in the

heat of the tin-roofed prison. The few days she was in prison, she actually went through hell. The Hon. Sushil Sinha, I.C.S., was then the Presidency Magistrate and the trial was held in his court. He ordered the release of all the prisoners and Nellie was once again free.

In the meanwhile, the other leaders of Bengal, such as Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Kiran Shankar Roy, tried to bring about a settlement between the Government and Jatindra Mohan as his health had fast deteriorated. He was finally transferred to Ranchi on June 5, 1933 and interned there. His wife and the niece, Eileen, were allowed to stay with him. He was not allowed to visit anyone else and no visitors were permitted.

Kshitish Babu, who had travelled with him to Ranchi, said later that Jatindra Mohan spoke to him till late at night and expressed deep feelings such as he had never uttered before. He also said that he had a premonition that he would not live long, but he said : "I shall go in such a way that no one will know. Don't tell others all must be prepared." Kshitish Babu was alarmed as he had never before heard his master speak in such touching terms. He had never seen Jatin despondent. He had always been undaunted and brave, but now he seemed to have succumbed to some psychic premonition. What he predicted did come true.



## CHAPTER XV

### INTERNMENT AND DEATH

Jatindra Mohan was accommodated in Nagendra Lodge on the outskirts of Ranchi. His most devoted followers were Kshitish Chandra Ganguli, who had given up his job in the 1921 Railway strike in Chittagong and had been Jatindra Mohan's disciple ever since, and Dwijen Kundu, one of his closest friends who always travelled with him. They were not allowed now to visit their master in Ranchi. They had also shared prison with their leader and the separation was very difficult to bear on both sides.

Jatindra Mohan was thus kept completely detached from the world. Another friend, Sukendu Sengupta, who had also given up his Government job and became Jatindra Mohan's follower, was also not allowed to see him. He was Jatindra Mohan's Secretary and used to call him "Mum" as did Nellie, Shisir and Budda—a nick-name which had become favourite in the family.

While in internment, Jatindra Mohan was allowed to go out for drives, but only under police escort. Thousands used to stand along the road and gaze at their hero, hungry for a word from him which they were not allowed to hear. This complete silence enforced on Jatindra Mohan, except to talk to his wife and niece, became a tremendous strain on the sick leader. So many restrictions and inhibitions greatly irked Jatindra Mohan. What was most unbearable was that Jatindra Mohan was allowed to see people but not to talk to them. To a man who was used to speaking the truth freely, this restriction was nothing short of torture. Nor were any comforts allowed.

Jatindra Mohan had never in his life felt so upset. He had now been in prison since January 1932—a period of nearly a year and a half. He was suffering acutely from high blood pressure and he knew that his time on earth was about to end. He had been arrested under Regulation III of 1818 under which the Government was empowered to detain without trial any person who was suspected to be disloyal to the British throne. On rare occasions, his other family-members were allowed to visit him and Ranendra Mohan or Shisir or Budda would then go to Ranchi. Jatin suffered from acute headaches and, on June 24, his temperature rose.

On July 22, 1933, Jatindra Mohan went out for a drive with his police escort and his wife and niece. He got off the car, walked a bit on the golf-course and went to watch a hockey match on Chaibasa Road. But he was not feeling very well and had an early dinner. He had a severe headache and felt great distress. Suddenly in the night, he gave a shout and Nellie and Eileen ran to him. They found him unconscious. The Civil Surgeon, Major Whyte, was sent for. He arrived and cut an artery to relieve the blood pressure. The blood spurted out and splashed the wall opposite, so high had been his pressure. He could not lift his arm and it was obvious that he had suffered a stroke. Nurses and other doctors arrived and were there for four hours. They tried in vain to bring back consciousness. At 1.45 A.M. on July 23, 1933, Jatindra Mohan passed away after trying to bid farewell to his wife. His two sons and younger brother were not there. "The Lion of Bengal" died in chains.

The family had been informed in Calcutta by telephone at about 10 P.M. on July 22. Budda, his youngest son, was ill at the time and Ranendra Mohan was asked to send a doctor immediately to Ranchi. He arranged with

Dr. Satish Sengupta, who had travelled to England as a student with Jatindra Mohan, to go to Ranchi the next morning. He also arranged for a car, so kindly given by Mr. K. C. Mahindra. He tried to arrange for an aeroplane, but it was too late. At 2 A.M., another telephone message was received in Calcutta saying that Jatindra Mohan was no more.

Shisir motored to Ranchi and Ranendra Mohan rang up Dr. B. C. Roy, Mr. J. C. Gupta and others and prepared to receive the body in Calcutta. The news was relayed and the whole of Calcutta went into mourning.

In Ranchi, the people were shocked. It was impossible for those who daily used to see Jatindra Mohan walking on the golf-course or taking his drive to believe that he was no more. He always looked so strong as he was a tall and sturdy man. Many shouted "Deshapriya is no more". The Europeans in Ranchi were kindness itself. Mr. Bion, the Police Superintendent, who had always been very friendly and concerned about Nellie and Eileen, made all the final arrangements. Major Whyte also fought hard to save Jatin's life and because he could not save him, he felt very unhappy. Khan Bahadur Ashan, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, also helped. He had become much attached to Deshapriya's family. The carriage which was to carry the remains of the hero to the station was decked with flowers. Men and women of all communities joined the procession. Mr. Bion and Mr. Ashan directed the procession. There was great sorrow. A special railway carriage was reserved and the body was placed within. The Ranchi Express left for Calcutta in the afternoon of July 23. It was met by a grieving crowd at every station, for the people were anxious to have a last glimpse of their beloved leader who had prematurely been snatched away. Kshitish Babu and Shisir, who had travelled by car, waited at Muri

Junction station. When Kshitish saw the body, he fainted. In the train, Nellie, Eileen and Shisir sat with stricken faces. Miss Jyotirmoyee Ganguly met the train at Tatanagar and she gave this graphic description : "There he lay still and voiceless, sleeping his last sleep amidst flowers. Ice cold was his body, ice was where the improvised coffin lay, and icy was the touch in our minds. 'They have killed him, oh, they have killed him' came out in sobs." Nellie sat silent in the next compartment. At Kharagpur, some staff members of the *Advance* came to see the leader's remains and, in her agony, Nellie cried out : "Oh, he will wake no more, wake no more, call as I might." Both at Tatanagar and Kharagpur, there were vast milling crowds. It was one of the saddest journeys ever recorded.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LAST JOURNEY

How many times had Jatindra Mohan been taken in procession during his lifetime in Calcutta? Great crowds always gathered to do him honour as he returned from prison or some important mission or to send him off as he was taken to jail. Now, he had come to Howrah for the last time, but he was not alive to speak to the people in his powerful voice which never needed a microphone to be heard all around. His body was in their midst, but his soul was elsewhere.

The sky had become gloomy and, as if in grief, it shed copious tears on the great leader; the rain poured down as the train reached Ramrajatolla, a small station two miles out of Howrah. When Eileen saw her young uncle, Ranendra Mohan, come to receive the body of his dead brother, her grief was uncontrollable. Many other leaders of Bengal were also present at Ramrajatolla, including the Mayor, and the Aldermen and Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation. There were flowers everywhere. With untold love, the body was taken out of the compartment on a stretcher and the crowd of mourners started for Howrah where arrangements had been made to take the procession to the Town Hall. Massive crowds met the funeral party. All the shops were closed and there was a spontaneous *hartal*. As the procession proceeded, flower petals and *khoi* and rosewater were showered on the beloved leader's body from balconies. The wailing of conch-shells rent the air and a Councillor cried: "There goes one of the greatest nationalists of our day. He was not one of those false

ones you see so much of these days." A biographer writes: "No sooner had the sun peeped through the eastern horizon than the citizens in their thousands, from all parts of the city, sorrow-laden and bare-footed, wended their way towards Howrah to greet their beloved chief who had just returned to his people, not in the fullness of life but in the stillness of death". The whole of Calcutta seemed to have travelled to Howrah on that sad morning.

At the Howrah Town Hall, the Municipal Commissioners, headed by the Chairman, placed a wreath on the bier on behalf of the Howrah Municipality. Here, the people got a *darshan* (glimpse) of their leader, hardly visible under the mass of wreaths which covered his body. At last, the procession was able to move forward towards Calcutta. It took an hour to reach the other side of Howrah bridge, a distance of only half a mile. As the procession proceeded, it swelled several times over. Those carrying the body were Santosh Kumar Basu, J. C. Gupta, B. C. Roy, J. N. Moitra, Nalini Sarkar, Pratap Chandra Guha Roy and others. All the leaders wished to carry the sacred remains in turn and thus pay their humble homage. The crowd numbered over a lakh near Howrah station. Crossing the Howrah bridge, it entered Burra Bazar. Here, the procession paused at the Sikh Sangat and the Sikhs paid their homage with unsheathed swords. Here also, a Buddhist monk from China, in yellow robes, joined the procession and continued to beat a leather instrument which sounded like a drum. Muslims, Christians and all other communities paid their homage. Under a shower of flowers, rose water and *khoi*, the procession proceeded along Harrison Road to Chitpur Road where a huge arch had been erected with a portrait of the departed leader. The procession swelled further in size as it went through Beadon Street and Chittaranjan Avenue. Shouts of "*Bande Mataram*" reverberated and people hoisted national flags on their houses at half-mast. There were

arches everywhere to honour him. At the junction of Harrison Road and College Street, a *kirtan* party joined the procession. In College Street, the students streamed out of their hostels and University institutes and paid their homage to the departed leader.

The procession then passed Dr. B. C. Roy's house in Wellington Street, wended its way through Dharamtalla Street and stopped at the *Advance* office. Here, Ranendra Mohan was waiting for the Founder and Editor and Chief of the paper. The Congress flag flew half-mast. Ranendra Mohan had taken his sister-in-law Nellie and his niece home from Ramrajatolla and had come back to the *Advance* office. The funeral procession reached the office at 12.15 A.M. and shouts of "Sengupta ki jai" were heard as the cortege came into sight. To dissipate the intense heat, street hydrants sprayed water on the processionists and the crowds fanned themselves to keep cool. The rain which had greeted the arrival of the train had completely stopped now. At the *Advance* office, Alderman J. C. Gupta, the Managing Director, made a speech in Bengali. The cortege then passed on through Corporation Street to Chowringhee Road and on to the Municipal Corporation Office where the Aldermen and Councillors awaited their great ex-Mayor's bier. Among them was Nellie Sengupta who was herself an Alderman. Dressed in pure white, she broke down when she saw her dead husband's bier being borne in. For twenty-four years, she had worked at his side sharing all the risks and poverty and distress. Never had she felt that she was an Englishwoman and that the freedom struggle in India was not hers. She had become an Indian the moment she married her illustrious husband. Now, she stood exhausted after the long, sad journey from Ranchi and the great grief weighed heavily on her. When she broke down, she was led away to the Lady Councillors'

retiring room. Mayor Santosh Kumar Basu placed a wreath of pure white lilies on the bier and said: "As a symbol of the deep love, admiration and respect in which you were held by your fellow-citizens in this great city, I am offering this floral tribute on behalf of myself and my colleagues in this Corporation of which for more than half a decade you were the undisputed leader and whose interests were dear to your heart till the last day of your life."

The procession then proceeded towards Jatin's house on Elgin Road *via* Chowringhee. A light shower now cooled the sweating people. Before it reached Elgin Road, it passed Woodburn Court and paused at the South Club, which Jatindra Mohan had been instrumental in creating and fostering into the most important tennis club in Asia. Arriving at Jatin's home, the bier was placed in front of the house, for Budda, the youngest son, to be able to see his father's body. He was ill and could not go to Ranchi or to the station. Many people, especially the women, were weeping. The whole family viewed the scene from the bedroom window as the crowd was too dense below. From Elgin Road, the procession went on towards the Keoratalla Burning Ghat *via* Asutosh Mukerjee Road, Russa Road and Rash Behari Avenue. Outside the Sikh temple of 'Jagat Sundar', Sikhs again paid their tribute by drawing out five swords and firing five shots. Prayers were said for the peace of the departed soul. From here onwards, about 2,000 Sikhs followed the procession shouting "*Sengupta ki jai*" and "*Sat Sri Akal*". Twelve Sikhs marched with drawn swords in front of the procession.

At last, the procession reached Keoratalla Ghat at 4-15 P.M. Here, thousands were awaiting the cortege. There was a great commotion at the entrance gate. Hundreds of people wanted to carry the body, but the pall-bearers re-



fused to let it be taken from them. With the help of the leaders, the body was at last placed on the funeral pyre at 5-30 P.M. After all the preparations had been made. Mrs. Kumudini Basu sang hymns and there were *kirtans* and Mr. Krishna Kumar Mitra offered prayers. Then Jatindra Mohan's eldest son, Shisir, performed the last rites according to Hindu custom and set the pyre aflame. The final ceremony was performed at 9.30 P.M. when Shisir sprinkled the funeral pyre with holy water from the Ganges. Thus passed away in glory, the great patriot of Bengal and valiant fighter in India's freedom struggle.

Gandhiji wired to Nell'e Sengupta: "Just heard Sengupta's sudden death. Your loss is also nation's. Pray count me as one of countless sharers of your loss."

In his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru commented on the death of Jatindra Mohan in these words:—

The end of July 1933 brought a painful and very disturbing piece of news—the sudden death of J. M. Sengupta. We had not only been close colleagues on the Congress Working Committee for many years, but he was also a link with my Cambridge days. We met in Cambridge first—I was a freshman and he had just taken his degree.

"Sengupta died while under detention. He had been made a State prisoner on his return from Europe early in 1932, while he was yet on board the ship in Bombay. Since then, he had been a prisoner or a detenu and his health had deteriorated. His funeral in Calcutta was the occasion for a remarkable mass demonstration and tribute; it seemed that the long-pent-up suffering soul of Bengal had found an outlet for a while at least. So, Sengupta had gone.\*

\**An Autobiography*, op. cit, p. 395

The day after the cremation on July 25, there was a mammoth condolence meeting in the Calcutta Maidan over which Acharya P. C. Ray presided. Perhaps, no other epitaph can be so fitting as Deshapriya's own words which he uttered on hearing of the death of Jatindra Nath Das in Lahore Jail after sixty-three days of fasting: "However much the Government of the country might imprison our body, our soul is beyond its control." Indeed, Jatindra Mohan was free at last, a liberty which he could never enjoy when alive. He had died with his own words resounding all around him—"Let Freedom be your dream".

## CHAPTER XVII

### 'DESHAPRIYA—THE MAN

In the tumultuous rush of political events which filled Jatindra Mohan's life, I have narrated the many chaotic happenings in India, and especially in Bengal. I may have, perhaps, omitted Jatindra Mohan's portrait as a man—a mere human being, with likes and dislikes, loves and emotions like anybody else. Indeed, Jatindra Mohan was very human. He loved life, of which, alas, he was able to enjoy far too little. He exulted in sport and clean exercise. He would have been one of the greatest lawyers of India if he had but been given the chance. Like the true democrat that he was, Jatindra Mohan loved the individual and his democratic rights.

Jatin was tall (6 ft.) and stout, but with a regality which could have placed him on the throne of kings. In his spotless *khaddar*, he sometimes looked like a Roman emperor, particularly when he had his *chudder* flung around him. It was not inappropriate that he succeeded Desh-bandhu in wearing the 'Triple Crown' which Mahatma Gandhi placed on his head. He wore *pince nez* spectacles which often hid the kindness of his eyes and their keen and interested expression.

During the few hours he could at times find for relaxation, he spent happy moments at home with all the fervour of a loving and devoted husband, father, brother and friend. The small amusements of life often took his mind away from the many cares and worries which surrounded him. Simple games with the family and friends on Sunday mornings, a walk in Eden Gardens, a *kirtan* party, these were the

few joys which life allowed him. To this day, those who knew him speak of his magnificence. He never, under any circumstances, sold his conscience; he never uttered a spiteful word and he never was false to himself or to God.

As a lawyer, he was brilliant, especially due to his remarkable gift of oratory. In spite of his preoccupation with politics, he became one of the leading criminal lawyers of India. There was the case, for instance, of the son of a zamindar who got involved in a murder case and had been convicted by the lower court. When Jatindra Mohan became his counsel and spoke for half an hour, defending him in the High Court, he was acquitted.

The Bawald Murder Case in Bombay was also another famous instance of Jatindra Mohan's prowess at the Bar. He defended the accused in the biggest murder case of the time. Eminent barristers had been engaged and the chief accused, Shafi Ahmed, was defended by Jatindra Mohan. Other barristers in the case were Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Volinkar. Jatindra Mohan made a brilliant defence and his fame as a lawyer rose high.

A strange omission, however, took place on his death when the High Court made no mention of him because he had died a political prisoner in spite of being a member of the Bar and a famous lawyer.

Justice Dwarkanath Mitra, Judge of the Calcutta High Court, however, paid the following noble tribute to Deshapriya :

The Calcutta Bar has sustained a very heavy loss by the death of Mr. Sen Gupta. He was a lawyer of repute and his achievements in the field, particularly of Criminal Law, are well known to all those who happen to be connected with the administration of justice here. I remember that, in 1929, when I was presiding over the Calcutta High Court session, Mr.

Sen Gupta appeared before me for the defence in a murder case. I was profoundly struck by the ability and dexterity with which he conducted the defence in that case. His persuasive eloquence was sufficient to induce the jury of nine men to return a divided verdict of 5 to 4 against Mr. Sen Gupta's client. As a Judge, I had to discharge the jury and ordered a re-trial. But the matter came up before another Judge and resulted in conviction. That shows the ability and dexterity and the forensic eloquence with which he conducted the defence in that case of which I can speak from my own personal knowledge.

Together with his ability to argue his cases in court went his gift of oratory. He had started on his career as a debater in Cambridge when he was President of the Majlis and the East-West Society. Public-speaking came naturally to him. He had a powerful voice and could always be heard in crowded audiences without the aid of a microphone. His speech at the Karachi Conference, when the bust of Deshbandhu C. R. Das was unveiled in 1931, will ever be remembered.

Jatindra Mohan rose to lyrical heights when he recounted the main features of Deshbandhu's life. He made Deshbandhu come alive before his audience "by the magic touch of his voice".

Manmathnath Rai Chaudhuri, though a Moderate, praised Jatindra Mohan's oratory. He said: "Jatin possessed a magnetic personality, richly endowed with a large fount of imagination, and gifted with great intellectual ability; he was pre-eminently fit to be a leader of men." His oratory was like a "violent stream, rushing down a steep precipice". He was a "giant Bengali—a fine specimen of his great race—a natural gentleman, who could be a warm friend even to those who disagreed with him." He was fluent and

impressive and hammered his points home. His dynamic personality won people over and his voice carried far, whether on the beach at Bombay or in the large Congress pandals, or in the Calcutta Maidan. Though not harsh and loud, his voice nevertheless thundered out. He spoke extempore, and with logic and continuity of thought. When he rose to speak, a hush fell on a hitherto agitated audience. "For half an hour, he pours forth in superb Bengali, striking home with a directness and a conviction that spread-eagle his opponents and bring about their discomfiture at once unexpected and complete." At the end of such speeches, the whole audience used to shout "*Bande Mataram*" and pledge themselves to the Congress. He could speak as fluently in perfect English.

This prodigy of Bengal was a keen sportsman. He was known as "the Sporting Mayor" and was an exception among Indian politicians in combining sport and politics. He was himself good at every game, and when bad health prevented him from active participation, he followed sports reports with great avidity. He was as facile in sport as he was a debater in the Legislative Council. He was particularly interested in football, swimming, tennis, cricket, hockey and rowing. In Cambridge, studying at Downing College, he won colours in rowing—an achievement with which very few Indians have been honoured. It was one of the sad facts of his life that when he was in prison, as he so often was, he always had to content himself by hearing or reading about the results of the Cambridge and Oxford boat race. He also earned colours in cricket and tennis. When he was Mayor, one of the great contributions he made to sporting life, not only in India, but in the whole of Asia, was the upgrading of the small South Club in Calcutta to an international 'Tennis Club of Asia'. His bronze profile still stands witness in this great sporting forum as the Mayor who

really put the club into its stride. He was its Vice-President for many years.

His interest in rowing did not cease when he returned from England. In 1928, a committee was formed with Jatindra Mohan as President to start the Lake Club in the Dhakuria lakes. With him were other sportsmen like Sir Biren Mookerjee and K. C. Mahindra. This club was started because Indians were not allowed to enter the exclusive rowing club which now stands next door to the Lake Club. Jatindra Mohan was determined to have an exclusive club for Indians. It was unfortunate that, by the time the club was built, he was in prison in 1932 and was never able to see the activities there or the happy sight of boys and girls sculling or rowing out on the deep waters of the lakes. When he was being taken from the Calcutta Medical College to Ranchi as a prisoner, he asked his police escort to take him round the lakes, which wish was granted. He was, however, not allowed to step into the club he had himself created. He could never enter the Lake Club. He was the first President but resigned as he was in prison and the Maharani of Cooch Behar succeeded him as President.

He was often seen at football matches in Calcutta when he was not in prison. In his death, the country lost not only a great patriot but one of India's keenest sportsmen. He played tennis and cricket for the Bar Library and met Europeans as equal members in clubs. They appreciated his sporting "quality as much as they regretted his political creed."

One of the most poignant partnerships in India's political history is the story of Jatindra Mohan and his wife, Nellie, who came out to India as a fresh, young, English girl and remained his partner at home, in jail and on the political rostrum. She proved completely true to the Hindu idea of *ardhangini*—the other half of her great husband. Nellie Sen-

gupta fought for India's freedom, not only because she was Jatindra Mohan's wife, but because she loved freedom and felt it was wrong for the British to keep 350 million human beings under their forced subjection. She always fought for the underdog. In her own right, she became an Alderman of the Calcutta Corporation and the third woman-President of the Indian National Congress. Later in life, she was elected a member of the Standing Health Committee of the Calcutta Corporation, a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, and a member of the East Pakistan Legislative Council.

Right through his life, Jatin proved himself to be a great 'soldier' and 'general'. He was always most honourable in his conduct and never hit anyone below the belt.

He had a rare capacity for laughter in tense moments. People liked working with him because he was a perfect gentleman. He had admirers among people of all shades of political opinion. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya once said of him that "he was greater as a gentleman than as a politician."

There are many quaint stories about Jatin. There was a man who forged a cheque and cheated Jatindra Mohan, but when caught, he was allowed to go free. He used to chat amiably with the sergeants and police superintendents who came to arrest him and always offered them tea and a cigar before he accompanied them to prison. Even policemen loved him and Englishmen in India remarked that "he was a Bengalee among Englishmen and an Englishman among Bengalees." In reality, he was a genuine, hundred per cent product of Bengal. He was a Brahmo unofficially, for he believed in no labels. At the same time, he was religious to the bone and he respected and loved Taracharan Sadhu of Calcutta. He had love for all communities and he had admirers in every community. A newspaper wrote :



“He was a brave, dutiful and honest man. He was never half-hearted. He saw through what he set his hands to. He had the makings of a leader in him. He was a silent, unostentatious and desolate man. The most striking trait of his character was his unbending determination not to submit to wrong.”

Today, no monument to this great son of India can bear witness to the days gone by, better than Nellie herself—who chose deliberately to dwell in Chittagong, the place of her husband's birth, serving the poor and ever remembering her loving husband. In the glorious and loving memories of her husband, she passes her days!

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**Jatindra Mohan became the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress in 1928 and was Acting President of the Indian National Congress in 1930.**

**Arrested several times for his nationalist activities, he spent long periods in prison, which undermined his health. He passed away in 1933 while under detention at Ranchi. The people honoured their leader by calling him "Deshapriya".**

**Readers will find this biography of great interest as a study in the self-effacing service of his country and people by a great man and patriot. The fact that the author of this biography is a member of his family lends authenticity to the narrative.**

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